



THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 59 | ISSUE 01 | JANUARY 2023

DFOBIRDS.ORG

DFO NEWS NOTES

Wow! A 12-day trip
to SE Arizona next May

PAGE 6

PETER RUPRECHT "IN THE SCOPE"

DFO trip leader with an eye
for Boulder County's allures

PAGE 19

FROM THE PRESIDENT

"There once was a
volunteer birder ..."

PAGE 5

LAST LOOK / LAST WORD

Holiday lookback: Denver's
"desert cardinal" surprise

PAGE 23

dfo
DENVER FIELD
ORNITHOLOGISTS



Hooded Merganser

Robert Raker
Mount Olivet Cemetery
Jefferson County



Robert Raker, a DFO member since 2014, is a former

environmental scientist, adventurer and filmmaker on many expeditions around the world. Now retired, he still goes rock-climbing and skiing.

ON THE COVER

Hooded Merganser: When it's here, so is winter

I wouldn't set my watch to it, but when the first Hooded Mergansers (*Lophodytes cucullatus*) arrive in Denver City Park, my mental birding calendar automatically flips over to winter. How about yours? I find it's only a matter of days, a couple of weeks at most, before the rest of the winter waterfowl gang begins to descend. For me, Hoodies are a pre-Christmas gift, delivered and opened about two months early.

What a total delight is this harbinger of the season (and North America's only entirely indigenous merganser): The cinnamon-sided, bubble-headed males in their zebra stripes, the earth-toned females in those delicate, sharply coiffed up-do's. I could spend hours (and I have) just watching them — from goofy packs of showoff males rocking and rolling their hammerheads for the females, to diving Hoodies of both sexes shaking, rattling and finally swallowing crayfish brought up from the bottom of Duck Lake. They're simply *Mesmergizing*!

The frosty Hooded Merganser on the cover of this first winter issue of *The Lark Bunting* was spotted last January by regular photo contributor **Rob Raker** on the Reno Ditch pond inside Mount Olivet Catholic Cemetery in Wheat Ridge. To me, it's the epitome of frozen cool. This one's yellowish eye and all-dark bill suggest it's an immature male rather than the similarly plumaged but brown-eyed, mostly yellow-billed female. But variations can still play identity tricks.

Whatever their color, Cornell's *Birds of the World* tells us Hoodies' eyes have a cool superpower: They can change how they refract light to improve their prey-seeking vision underwater. And like those of the American Dipper, their eyes also have nictating membranes, transparent extra eyelids that act like protective goggles.

With their cute-factor look — stylish plumage, delicate features, pop-up “hoods” and diminutive size (smallest of North America's three mergansers) — you might think of Hoodies as the toy poodles of the waterfowl world. Except lapdogs don't see underwater, dive like whales, and hunt crustaceans and fish like a terrier after a rat.

Because Hooded Mergansers breed far north or east of Colorado, we may forget that they nest in tree cavities like Wood Ducks and Common Mergansers do. The female chooses the site (whether natural cavity or built box) and uses only what nesting material is already in it, plus some of her own down feathers. Once she starts incubating up to thirteen eggs, the male skips town. Like other cavity nesters, within 24 hours of hatching her brood, momma Hoodie is on the ground, calling them to leap down and walk with her to the nearest water.

That is, the ones in her own nest. Like Brown-headed Cowbirds, Hooded Mergansers are brood parasites, often laying some of their eggs in the nests of other cavity nesters, who in turn do the same back. But at this stage, they're all chicks.

Fun fact: *Birds of the World* also tells us Hoodies sit in between goldeneyes and the rest of the mergansers on the taxonomic scale, sharing many vocalizations and courtship moves with them. Perhaps this explains why they occasionally cross-breed with Common Goldeneye. I saw my first such hybrid in City Park in early November, cruising Ferril Lake with a goldeneye female.

Here's wishing you Hoodies aplenty this holiday season!

— Patrick O'Driscoll



IN THIS ISSUE

- 2 On the Cover**
Hooded Merganser:
When it's here, so is winter
- 5 From the President**
Volunteers, please?
- 6 DFO News**
DFO News Notes
- 10 Christmas Count**
More Denver Count volunteers
needed now
- 12 Program Previews**
New winter-spring lineup:
Cranes, grouse, Cooper's Hawks
- 16 DFO Grants**
Time to apply for 2023
- 17 In the Scope**
Trip leader Peter Ruprecht
of Boulder County
- 19 Club Quarterly**
DFO business update
- 22 New Members, Contributions**
- 23 Last Look, Last Word**
The bird who came for Christmas
(maybe), New Year's (possibly),
and well beyond

The Lark Bunting newsletter of Denver Field Ornithologists is published online monthly at dfobirds.org except for joint issues in July–August and February–March.

PUBLICATION STAFF

Editor

Patrick O'Driscoll

Assistant Editor

Mike Fernandez

Photo Editor

Jim Esten

Layout and Design

Jennie Dillon

Contributors

Marc Strong, Susan Blansett, Rob Raker, Peter Ruprecht, Anne Craig, Joey Kellner

CONTRIBUTE TO THE NEWSLETTER

Submit original articles or story ideas to the editor at patodrisk@gmail.com.

Send image-file photos of birds or bird outings to the photo editor at jcesten@gmail.com.

Editors reserve the right to accept and edit suitable articles and photos for publication.

NEWSLETTER ADVERTISING

The Lark Bunting does not accept or contain paid advertising. DFO **AdBIRDtisements** are FREE to club members to seek or sell bird-related equipment, supplies, books and decorative items (artwork, photos, clothing, note cards, etc.).

- Ads must include name, email and/or telephone number, and may include weblink if items offered online
- Ads may be edited for inappropriate content or excessive length (125-word limit); ONE photo or image per ad
- Ads do not carry over each month. To renew, resubmit by next deadline
- Available *only* to DFO members
- Deadline: last day of month except January and June (*The Lark Bunting* does not publish in February and July)

Send AdBIRDtisement materials to editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com.

Next deadline: Saturday, Dec. 31





A community of birders, learning and acting together for avian wildlife

Denver Field Ornithologists is an all-volunteer organization that conducts hundreds of free birdwatching field trips throughout the year and welcomes participation and membership by all. DFO promotes enjoyment of nature, the study of birds, and protection of them and their habitats in greater Denver and beyond.

In addition to field trips, evening programs and birding workshops, DFO conducts community science in the field, including the spring Hawk Watch raptor migration count on Dinosaur Ridge.

DFO awards grants for bird-related research, education and conservation projects in Colorado.

DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and financial contributions to DFO's three giving funds are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

DFO OFFICERS

President

Susan Blansett
susan.blansett@gmail.com

Vice President

Sharon Tinianow
sharontinianow@gmail.com

Secretary (interim)

Nathan Bond
dfobirds.secretary@gmail.com

Treasurer

Kathy Holland
kcloudview@comcast.net

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Mary Cay Burger
mcburger3@juno.com

Karen Drozda
drozforte@aol.com

Mary Geder
mfg5000@live.com

Tina Jones
tjcalliope@hotmail.com

Roger Koester
koester1949@gmail.com

Patrick O'Driscoll
patodrisk@gmail.com

Steve Ryder
cedarmesa@yahoo.com

David Suddjian
dsuddjian@gmail.com

Bill Turner
toursbyturner@aol.com

Elaine Wagner
eWagner1000@yahoo.com

COMMITTEE CHAIRS AND ROLES

Better Birding Skills

Sharon Tinianow (acting)
sharontinianow@gmail.com

Communications & Outreach

Sharon Tinianow
sharontinianow@gmail.com

Conservation

Steve Ryder
cedarmesa@yahoo.com

Field Trips

David Suddjian
david suddjian@gmail.com

Finance

Roger Koester
koester1949@gmail.com

Grants

Elaine Wagner
eWagner1000@yahoo.com

Hawk Watch

David Hill
davidhill2357@gmail.com

Membership

VACANT

Nominations

Mary Geder
mfg5000@live.com

Programs Director

Bill Turner
toursbyturner@aol.com

Historian

Kristine Haglund
kahaglund1@aol.com

Web Administrator

Jim Esten
admin@dfobirds.org

Zoom Coordinator

Peter Stoltz
dfobirds.zoom@gmail.com

DFO ONLINE

Website

dfobirds.org

Facebook Group

facebook.com/groups/dfobirds

Instagram

instagram.com/denverfieldornithologists

CONTACT

Email

dfocommsgroup@gmail.com

Via website

dfobirds.org

Located at the bottom of the homepage

US Mail

Attn: Kathy Holland,
Treasurer, DFO
351 E Caley Ave
Centennial, CO 80121-2201

LEARN MORE

Membership — Join or Renew

dfobirds.org/DFO/Membership

Field Trips — Explore / Sign Up

dfobirds.org/FieldTrips.aspx

Volunteering

dfobirds.org/DFO/Volunteer.aspx

Charitable Giving

dfobirds.org/DFO/Donations.aspx

DFO Merch Store

zazzle.com/store/official_dfo_shop



FROM THE PRESIDENT

Hey, DFO: Who's ready to volunteer? Did you know it's good for you? (no joke)

Susan Blansett

Well, maybe the joke's on me. Wanting to start this column on a light-hearted note, I cruised the internet in search of a limerick about volunteers. ("*There once was a volunteer birder . . .*") But the results kept coming back with the County Limerick Volunteer Centre in Ireland, a "vibrant Irish society where every person feels connected to their community through active participation." Right – sounds like a great group!

Then I looked up "funny poems about volunteers." I can now attest that there are none (seriously, they were all really bad and not funny). OK, so evidently there's nothing funny about volunteering. But I can also attest that volunteering CAN be *fun* — and what's more, it really is good for you.

Research shows there are great side effects to volunteering for a good cause. Giving your time to a worthy pursuit like DFO, for instance, can:

- Reduce stress and strengthen your immune system
- Unite people behind a common goal, building camaraderie and teamwork
- Promote personal growth and self-esteem
- Help people build references and gain marketable experience
- Make a difference — to a cause, to a community, or to both
- Save resources — it's one reason DFO membership costs so little. We're all volunteers (even as we mentor others and build friendships)

DFO has been a volunteer outfit since its founding in 1935 as the Colorado Bird Club. It's volunteers who've kept our club innovating through the decades, even increasing membership and influence through the pandemic years. Today, about 60 volunteers enable DFO to do, well, everything we do. They lead amazing field trips, produce monthly programs, find and fund worthy avian research, count raptors in migration, inform, educate and entertain using Facebook and Instagram, engage in conservation activities, publish this newsletter, and conduct the nonprofit business part of DFO to bring more people to

an appreciation of birds and their habitats. That's just 60 DFO volunteers in the service of nearly 700 members and at least another 1,300 non-member participants — not to mention the birds!

Pre-pandemic, it was easy to stand up and recognize volunteers at our monthly in-person meetings. These days, getting any larger group together takes considerably more work. But we're going there in 2023. Two of DFO's officers — vice president **Sharon Tinianow** and secretary **Nate Bond** — are incubating plans for a new kind of DFO social event: A meetup in a warm-weather month specifically to thank our volunteers and celebrate their selfless work — together, in person.

In addition, changes are in the works to make our website's volunteerism page easier for bird enthusiasts to offer their own skills and make a DFO difference in whatever time they have available to share.

With so much going on in our organization, opportunities abound for making a difference in as little as a couple of hours, a couple of pages, a couple of social media posts. Are you nimble on your computer keyboard? The Hawk Watch Committee could use your help uploading some historical data. Are you good at social media marketing? The Communications & Outreach Committee can use your speedy thumbs on Instagram or Facebook. Is your knack planning an event or creating content? Sharon and Nate can use your help. Want to learn how to lead field trips? **David Suddjian** and his field trips training team can get you started.

Volunteering for DFO isn't just joining committees or attending board meetings — although if helping to run the organization fills your tub, we'll hook you up with Nomination chair **Mary Geder**. Or perhaps you know of something DFO needs that we haven't even thought of yet. If so, go to the "[Volunteer Today](#)" page of our website and share your ideas, please! And thank you!

Just one more note before I sign off: Did you hear that **Justin Timberlake** has *volunteered* to serve alongside the defense forces in Ukraine? It's true, and his first assignment is [Crimea River](#).

— Susan Blansett

DFO News Notes

Got blurbs on birds? Share with **DFO News Notes**: Colorado birding newsbits, eBird milestones, tales from the trail, birding life (and life birds!), etc. Send items, photos and any questions to newsletter editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES: HELP US HELP DFO!

At times, running our all-volunteer organization can seem like a circus in which we're the jugglers, keeping all those flaming torches, knives, and bowling pins in the air. But here are three easy (and far less daring) ways YOU can help us. Best of all, each can be done by one person, working from home on your own computer, on your own schedule. Check them out!

PROGRAM VIDEO CURATOR

Like videos? We need someone to review the recordings of past DFO programs and organize them into subject categories to make it easy for people to find bird-related videos that interest them.

DFO's Communications & Outreach Committee will work with you on how to tackle this task and make the information available. If you're interested or have questions, contact **Sharon Tinianow** at sharontinianow@gmail.com

HAWK WATCH DATA ENTRY

DFO's spring raptor migration counters need help entering historical data from past counts on Dinosaur Ridge into the national [HawkCount database](#) online. DFO's Hawk Watch Committee recently found nine years of counts from the 1990s to upload into a pre-designed Excel spreadsheet. If your computer is Excel-capable and you have some free time, we'll train you to input the data. If you're interested or have questions, contact **Carol Cwiklinski** at ccwiklin@gmail.com

PROGRAM PROMOTIONS

DFO promotes and shares its many programs with the public on our website, our Facebook and Instagram pages, and the CoBirds list-serv on Google. The C&O team will train you in posting each month on these platforms. We provide you the raw material; you get to make it look good and sound engaging! If you're interested or have questions, contact **Sharon Tinianow** at sharontinianow@gmail.com

HIT THE ROAD, DFO:

12-DAY SE ARIZONA FIELD TRIP NEXT MAY!

You read that right: Veteran DFO field trip leader and fan of Arizona birding **Joey Kellner** has organized one of the most ambitious DFO trips in years: a TWELVE-day driving field trip to, through and back from Southeastern Arizona, one of the most premier birding destinations of all.

Scheduled for **May 18-29, 2023**, this eight-person trip (Kellner plus seven) promises prime birding habitat with a long list of the region's birds in mind: Chihuahuan desert grasslands, oak and sycamore canyons, pine-topped mountains and upper Sonoran Desert areas of thorn scrub, grassland and cactus, and green riparian ribbons.

Designed for first-timers to the region but open to all, the trip will cover numerous hotspots from desert floor to "sky island" mountains, including the Chiricahuas, Santa Ritas, Huachucas and possibly the Catalinas. "We should see most of the specialty species of the sky islands and other habitats," says Kellner, with a chance for up to eight species of hummingbird (including Violet-crowned, Lucifer and White-eared) and many other species. "This is not specifically a target species trip, but a general southeast Arizona trip that will immerse the participants in wonderful habitats."

All-inclusive cost (both motel and "in-habitat" lodging, gas, food/meals, leader expenses and land/access fees) is \$2,600-per-person if two vehicles are rented for the carpool trip, or \$1,900 if two personal vehicles are used. Selection of Kellner's seven participants will be by random drawing on **Jan. 15, 2023** from all names registered during a one-month window (**Dec. 15 through Jan. 14**) on the DFO field trip webpage. Winners pay \$400 deposits to reserve their spots, which are not refundable after April 15, the due date to pay the balance of the trip cost.

For questions and details, contact Kellner at vireol@comcast.net. A detailed itinerary with day-by-day locations and potential bird species for each is [available on the DFO website](#).



White-eared Hummingbird
Patrick O'Driscoll

Continued on page 7

REMEMBERING TWO LONGTIME BIRDING FRIENDS FROM EVERGREEN

The day before our newsletter deadline, we learned of the November passing of two friends of DFO, both from Evergreen: **Marilyn Rhodes**, master birder, Audubon field trip leader, and DFO member, and **William “Bill” Hackos, Jr.**, DFO member.

DFO member and Colorado birding icon **Hugh Kingery** announced Rhodes’ “unexpected passing” in a Nov. 29 CoBirds posting. He noted that she led the Denver Botanic Gardens/Country Club/Wash Park section of the annual Denver Urban Christmas Count. Rhodes was “a caring mentor to new (Audubon) field trip leaders, and very active on our photo contest committee,” Kingery added. Rhodes, active in both Denver and Evergreen Audubon, described herself on her Twitter page as “Wildlife lover/advocate, environmentalist, photographer, gardener, politics/news junkie, Hillary supporter, (and) retired lady of leisure with 4 dogs and 2 cats.”

An online obituary says Hackos, a New Jersey native (1939), met his wife (and fellow birder) **JoAnn** in graduate school (he had a PhD in astrophysics, she a PhD in English lit). He taught physics, astronomy, engineering, and ran a college computing center before the family (sons **Nathan** and **David**) moved in 1977 to Colorado, where Bill and JoAnn ran their own international consulting business. Bill enjoyed finding and learning about new birds, wildflowers and butterflies. He also served on the board of Evergreen Audubon (JoAnn is the club’s director of conservation), led a Christmas Bird Count route for years, and volunteered at the Evergreen Nature Center. The couple also did a North American Big Year in 2011, traveling extensively to tally 436 species while still running their business. Bill is survived by his wife, sons and eight grandchildren. In lieu of flowers, the family welcomes donations in his name to [Evergreen Audubon](#).



CASSIA CROSSBILL: AFTERTHOUGHTS FROM COLORADO’S BIRD LISTENER

The discovery of the rare Cassia Crossbill last summer in Colorado triggered a flurry of birding — and birdcall recording — in Summit County, mostly in and around the DFO-created [Alfred M. Bailey Bird Nesting Area](#). Now, in a guest blogpost on the [Finch Research Network](#), birdsong expert **Nathan Pieplow** poses a provocative question: Is the Cassia Crossbill a species or not? The answer(s) are rather complicated, leading to even more questions. We’ll offer no spoilers here, but Pieplow, author of the *Peterson Field Guide to Bird Sounds*, presents an interesting take on Cassia and its close relation, the “Type 9 Red Crossbill,” and how Cassia apparently didn’t just show up in Colorado last summer or, for that matter, the previous year, either. Read for yourself in his guest blogpost, [Cassia Crossbills in Colorado — The Mystery Deepens](#).

Continued on page 8

THANKS FOR YOUR DFO SERVICE, SUE!

DFO member **Sue Summers**, our club's treasurer for six years before becoming Membership chair last year, resigned her post and DFO Board membership at the end of October. Born and raised in the Seattle area, Sue took up birding in Washington state. She joined DFO soon after moving to Colorado nine years ago. In 2016, she became DFO treasurer and served until 2021. Since her departure, DFO has been searching for someone to take her place as Membership chair. This volunteer opportunity is a great way to get to know more of our hundreds of members and contribute your communication and organizational skills to the DFO cause. Want to know more? Contact DFO Nominations chair **Mary Geder** at mfg5000@live.com or 303-981-8823.

LESSER PRAIRIE-CHICKEN NOW “THREATENED” IN COLORADO

This one almost slipped below our radar in November, but after years of study, the US Fish & Wildlife Service has declared the Lesser Prairie-Chicken “threatened” in its southeastern Colorado range (and parts of Kansas, Oklahoma and the Texas Panhandle) and “endangered” farther south in New Mexico and Texas. This is an important and overdue moment in the protection of a seldom-seen Plains species. Learn more at [Fish & Wildlife](#) and Denver’s [Colorado Sun online newspaper](#).

MORE “BIRD BOMBS” DROPPING IN DECEMBER, JANUARY

DFO’s popular half-hour, mini-workshop sessions via Zoom will carry through the holidays on two more winter evenings. Register for one or both on the [DFO “PROGRAMS”](#) webpage.

Dec. 29, 7 p.m.

“**First State Record!**” will take crystal-ball looks at what could be our next new record species sightings in Colorado

Jan. 12, 2023, 7 p.m.

“**Mountain Finches**” will sort through rosy-finches, grosbeaks, and other high-country seed eaters

GRILLE'D BUT ALIVE: GREAT HORNED OWL SURVIVES COLORADO TRUCK

In mid-November, a passerby noticed the head of a Great Horned Owl sticking out from under the front of a pickup truck in Colorado Springs. Wait, WHAT? Wildlife officer **Travis Sauder** of Colorado Parks & Wildlife responded to “a call for help of an owl stuck in a truck grille” — and that’s what he found, “indeed, stuck. And alive!” Sauder wrote on CPW’s Twitter page. The thinking is the bird probably flew in front of the moving truck the previous night while pursuing prey and was sucked in — “and the driver didn’t even know it.” CPW says it sent the injured owl to the nonprofit Nature and Wildlife Discovery in Pueblo for rehabilitation. You can see [owl photos, narrative and video of the saga](#) on CPW’s Twitter page.

SPEAKING OF OWLS . . .

In November, Fort Collins Audubon hosted a talk by Bird Conservancy of the Rockies avian ecologist **Marion Clément**, “A Tiny Menace in the Forest: The Northern Saw-whet Owl.” Clément banded saw-whets in the Fort Collins area in 2022 and BCR hopes to have her continuing the banding effort in 2023. [Clément’s talk](#) is available on YouTube. A word of warning: The sound quality is a little iffy, so turn up the volume and listen closely. The photos and other PowerPoint graphics are fine.



Top: Great Horned Owl caught under moving truck
Bottom: Owl with Officer Sauder
Robin Smith, CPW

DFO: It's ALL of us

In full-page displays this fall, we have introduced you to just three of your more than 675 fellow members of Denver Field Ornithologists

Whether we belong to DFO for its hundreds of **free field trips** (an annual offering unparalleled anywhere) . . .

Or for the opportunity to sharpen birding skills in **workshops** . . .

Or for **monthly programs** by exceptional speakers . . .

Or simply to share in appreciating and conserving birds and their habitats in Colorado . . .

Our strength is in our numbers — in our love for birds and their place among us . . . and ours among them

Help keep DFO strong and your connection to Colorado birds and birding vital

Join DFO or renew your membership now before year's end

And while you're there, consider a tax-free, year-end contribution to one of DFO's three giving funds

**CLICK HERE FOR DFO
MEMBERSHIP PAGE**

dfo
DENVER FIELD
ORNITHOLOGISTS



URGENT! More volunteers needed Dec. 17 for Denver Christmas Bird Count

Last month's appeal in *The Lark Bunting* and on the CoBirds list-serv for volunteers to staff the annual suburban Denver Christmas Bird Count was apparently like the tree that falls in the forest with nobody around to hear it. Did YOU not hear?

With very few signups since then and less than a week until the Dec. 17 event, count compiler **Joey Kellner** is urgently appealing for birders of all abilities to join now.

"The three years prior to COVID-19, we had an average of more than 160 people helping out," Kellner said in late November. "So far this year, we are well short of that — or maybe participants are slow to sign up?" He said if lingering COVID-related concerns are a reason — or if lack of motivation because of "pandemic fatigue" is keeping you away — getting out into the field the week before Christmas is a great and invigorating motivator.

"As compiler for the Denver CBC for the past 11 years, I can really use YOUR help now," Kellner added. "ALL experience levels are welcome."

One wrinkle this year that also may have had an effect is that online signing up through the DFO field trip registration system, which was used for the two most recent counts, has been discontinued. But Kellner noted that volunteers need simply to choose one of the 24 count areas in the 15-mile "count circle" (*see map*) and contact the leader for that area on the list of leaders with the map. The circle covers most of the southwestern quadrant of suburban Denver, reaching primarily into Jefferson and Douglas counties.

"Right now, most of the foothills areas need additional observers — many have only the area leader signed up so far," Kellner added. "As you know, the more eyes and ears the better the count."

Kellner said prospective participants should contact the leader of their chosen area directly for details: Meetup time and location, walking-hiking-driving mix, lunch break options, etc. "Even if you can only break away for a few hours, your help is SO appreciated. Thank you in advance."

Traditionally, many DFO members have participated in these annual counts, which are part of National Audubon's national Christmas Bird Count. In fact, there are more than 50 such "circles" for counts across the rest of Colorado including metro Denver.

As noted in last month's newsletter, here are the Christmas Bird Count particulars:

WHO / WHAT

68th Denver Christmas Bird Count, with DFO's Joey Kellner (303-978-1748, SWDenverBirding@gmail.com) as count leader/compiler. (Not to be confused with the separate "Denver Urban" count, led by longtime DFO and Denver Audubon member **Hugh Kingery**, which is on New Year's Day.)

WHEN

Saturday, Dec. 17, all day. Count area hours will vary from half-days to full days and in between.

HOW TO JOIN

Consult the map to see which area count you'd like to join, then contact the area leader of that zone (*see leader list and numbered map*). And if you want to offer your help in any area that needs additional observers, contact Kellner himself (*email and phone details above*).

COST

No charge — and therefore, "No excuses!" Kellner added.

Continued on page 11

AREA NUMBER AND LOCATION

AREA LEADER

CONTACT INFO

1.	Red Rocks Park	Gregg Goodrich	303-655-9135
2.	Lower Bear Creek	Scott Somershoe	615-829-3573
2	A. Bear Creek Lake Park	Cyndy Johnson	303-378-1335
3.	Bow Mar/Marston	Mark Amershek	720-243-1521
4A.	Lower South Platte - East	Ed Holub	303-979-2194
4B.	Lower South Platte - West	Glenn Walbek	720-560-3671
5.	Highline Ditch	Nancy Crews	303-842-2833
6.	Plum Creek	Norm Erthal	303-917-2596
7A.	Middle South Platte - West	Sue Summers	253-678-3721
7B.	Middle South Platte - East	Frank Coons	970-640-9902
8.	Chatfield State Park	Joey Kellner	303-978-1748
9.	Upper South Platte	Jill Holden	720-288-4018
10.	Lower Deer Creek (Chatfield Farms)	Barbra Sobhani	303-905-4718
11.	Upper Deer Creek	Paul Slingsby	720-347-5169
12.	Yegge Peak	Cynthia Madsen	303-770-6534
13.	Doublehead Mountain	Amy Davis	303-549-7759
14.	North Turkey Creek	Ed Furlong	303-956-8321
15.	Indian Hills	Dick Prickett	303-674-0217
16.	Upper Bear Creek	Laura Steadman	lauramsteadman@gmail.com
17.	Ken Caryl Ranch	David Suddjian	dsuddjian@gmail.com
18.	Garrison Gate	+ + LEADER NEEDED + +	
19.	Morrison/Willowbrook	Chris Gilbert	804-214-1508
20.	Willow Creek	Dale Pate	575-706-4584
21.	Mount Lindo/Willow Springs	Chris Sherry	303-807-3645

DFO Zooms into 2023 monthly programs with crane, grouse and hawk talks

Three charismatic but entirely different bird species of western steppes, inland flyways and urban forests are subjects of the first three Denver Field Ornithologists' monthly evening programs in winter and spring 2023.

The monthly presentations, now webcast live for all via Zoom and archived for later viewing on the DFO website, resume after our December recess with a Jan. 23 talk by the head of the International Crane Foundation, which works from the US for all 15 crane species worldwide. The February program features an Audubon Rockies' policy and outreach director discussing efforts to conserve the Greater Sage-Grouse amid political wrangling and continuing habitat loss across the West. Scheduled for March is a Denver raptor biologist who is studying how urban redlining in the mid-20th century influenced where and whether Cooper's Hawk, historically a forest species, has pioneered as successfully into Denver as the species has in other urban settings.

As is now customary, the fourth seasonal presentation in April (before the monthly series takes a summer hiatus until August) will feature reports to the DFO membership from some of the scientists, researchers and educators who received grants in 2022 from our Research, Education & Conservation Grant Fund. In accepting DFO grants, the recipients agree to report on their progress and findings to the club membership in any of three ways: Making a presentation at the annual April meeting, writing an account for DFO's newsletter, or leading a DFO field trip centered on their grant research or work.

More details about each speaker and topic, and how to register for these free evening programs, follow. Look for details about the April 24 grant recipients' program in an upcoming issue of *The Lark Bunting*.

Continued on page 13



International Crane Foundation: 50 Years for Whoopers, Sandhills and Many More

Rich Beilfuss
Monday, January 23
7 p.m. MST via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

Tall, stately and heart-stoppingly charismatic, arising as one with ancient, resounding voices, cranes are nonetheless among the most endangered families of birds in the world. Eleven of the globe's 15 species are threatened or endangered, and our own North American examples reflect both the plentiful (Sandhill) and the few (Whooping).

Since 1973, the Wisconsin-based [International Crane Foundation](#) has advocated for them and 13 other crane species found across Africa, East Asia, Southeast Asia and Europe. The foundation, whose mission in part is “to conserve cranes and the ecosystems, watersheds and flyways on which they depend,” also works with local partners in more than 50 countries to rear new generations of the rarest cranes.

DFO's first evening program of the new year will feature **Rich Beilfuss**, the foundation's president and CEO. He works from the foundation's headquarters in Baraboo, WI, which serves as a global center for crane conservation leadership and training. (From spring through fall, the center also hosts visitors who can see all the species on the 300-acre headquarters site.)

The foundation employs more than 125 staff and associates and has offices in five other countries and Texas. “We provide knowledge, leadership and inspiration to engage people in resolving threats to cranes and their diverse landscapes,” reads the rest of its mission statement.

Beilfuss, who has headed the foundation since 2010, has helped launch many of the foundation's signature projects and conservation programs across Asia, Africa, and North America. Over a 30-year career, he has written more than 100 scientific papers, technical reports, proceedings and publications for lay audiences as well as for governments, communities and scientific peers worldwide.

A licensed professional hydrologist with a PhD in wetland ecology, Beilfuss has worked on water management and wetlands restoration to benefit cranes in more than 20 countries across Africa and Asia, focusing on Nepal, Vietnam, Mozambique and Zambia. He also has contributed to restoration and management of thousands of acres of prairie and savanna landscapes in the US Midwest.

The foundation's focus on conservation of North America's endangered Whooping Crane population is featured in a 14-minute video, [Cranes: Symbols of Survival](#), narrated by longtime NBC News anchor **Tom Brokaw**.





Daly Edmunds

Greater Sage-Grouse: Largest Conservation Effort in US History

Daly Edmunds
Monday, February 27
7 p.m. MST via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

The Greater Sage-Grouse is found in Colorado and across 10 other western states in North America's largest but often overlooked ecosystem. Largely inconspicuous except when males congregate in remote courtship leks to strut and display for mates, this species was once so prevalent that it fed many pioneers during their grueling journeys through the West.

Today, with most of these iconic birds of the sagebrush steppes found on public lands, they have become a political football. In DFO's monthly evening program for February, **Daly Edmunds** of Audubon Rockies will discuss the political intrigue that has plagued sage-grouse management. She will also review the threats to sage-grouse habitat and share the latest science on the species.

Edmunds is director of policy and outreach for [Audubon Rockies](#), National Audubon's Fort Collins-based regional office for Colorado, Wyoming and Utah. In this role, she is responsible for furthering the organization's [Sagebrush Ecosystem Initiative](#), which works regionally to conserve the high, dry western habitat on which more than 350 wild species depend. The initiative convenes citizens, industry, government and non-government organizations to find ways to balance the needs of people and birds.

An [alarming new report](#) in September by the U.S. Geological Survey found a staggering 1.3 million acres of sagebrush habitat are being lost annually. Sagebrush was once the most widespread vegetation type across western North America. Now only half of it is left, and new demands continue to be placed on it.

Daly earned her master's degree from the University of Wyoming, studying pronghorn movement patterns. Before joining Audubon in 2009, she worked for the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, National Wildlife Federation, and Wyoming Wildlife Federation.



Fighting sage-grouse males (Elizabeth Boehm, Audubon Photography Awards)



Alyssa Davidge
Claire Harris

How Historical Redlining Led Denver's Cooper's Hawks to Live Where They Do

Alyssa Davidge

Monday, March 27

7 p.m. MDT via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

Once known as a feared and artful raptor mainly in the deciduous and mixed forests of rural and wildlands America, the Cooper's Hawk has pioneered outward to become a regular resident of urban and suburban landscapes since the 1970s. Cornell's *Birds of the World* calls it "likely the most common backyard breeding raptor across North America."

The species' remarkably successful adaptation to urban environments like Denver's is predicated chiefly on forest conditions in the neighborhoods where we find (and enjoy seeing) it. Designed by nature to maneuver swiftly through robust woodlands in pursuit of its prey, Cooper's is most comfortable where the trees are mature and numerous.

Alyssa Davidge, the Denver raptor biologist who will present March's provocatively titled program, finds it no coincidence that those places are neighborhoods intentionally favored by the historically segregationist housing policies of the 1930s. One of those practices was "redlining," which made mortgage loans unavailable or unaffordable to people of color in the predominantly minority neighborhoods where they were largely confined by segregation.

"How does racism affect wildlife? This talk will explore how Cooper's Hawks use urban Denver," says Davidge, "and suggest that our management of the city as a result of redlining policies . . . may play a role in (the birds') decisions. I will look at the current occupancy rates of Cooper's Hawks in Denver within redlining neighborhood categories as well as different land attributes across Denver to explore the impact of these historic policies on today's urban raptors." Her presentation is subtitled, "Impacts of Historic Redlining Policy on Wildlife Habitat and Cooper's Hawk Occupancy."

Davidge is a second-year master's student in the University of Colorado Denver's Integrative Biology Department. Before returning to graduate school, she was a condor biologist with the Peregrine Fund, managing the California Condor population on the North Rim of the Grand Canyon. She also worked several seasons banding terns and plovers for the San Diego Zoo's Conservation Research Institute, conserving spotted owl populations in the Sierra Nevada Mountains, and monitoring migratory birds for HawkWatch International and Cape May Raptor Banding Project in Washington, New Mexico, and New Jersey. Her current focus is on smarter policy decisions for the future of conservation and biodiversity. She hopes to become a wildlife biologist with raptor focus for Colorado Parks & Wildlife, the US Fish & Wildlife Service, or the US Geological Survey.



Alyssa Davidge and Cooper's Hawk (Brian Millsap)



Emma Riley and
Northern Harrier

DECEMBER PROGRAM REVIEW

Hawk Watch program review next month

The Nov. 28 evening program — “Hawk Watch 2022: Looking Back and Forward” with **Emma Riley** — fell too close to *The Lark Bunting’s* deadline to include a written review in this issue. We will publish our review in next month’s newsletter.

In the meantime, if you were unable to watch the presentation live on Zoom, you can view the program recording on the [DFO “Past Programs” webpage](#).

DFO GRANTS

Call goes out for 2023 DFO grant applications

The DFO Research, education and Conservation Fund is now accepting applications for grants to encourage the study, appreciation and preservation of birds and their habitats. DFO gives priority to projects in the Denver metropolitan area, the Front Range, the rest of Colorado, and the nation, in that order.

Research, educational and conservation projects are funded annually from the generosity of DFO members and other donors. DFO first awarded these modest grants in 1994 when **Mary Hope Robinson** donated \$15,000 to establish the DFO Educational Endowment Fund. DFO changed the name in 2012. In the years since the first grants, DFO has awarded at least \$74,000 to researchers and educators.

On the research side, DFO grants support college undergraduate, graduate and post-graduate research in ornithology and related disciplines. Education grants help nurture new generations of birders and contribute to increase birding opportunities in local Colorado communities.

The grant application form and a history of past grants are available on the [DFO website](#). Applicants should include detailed descriptions of projects, goals, budget need that a grant would help cover, and how the project relates to conserving Colorado birds and their habitat. The application deadline is **Feb. 1, 2023**. Grant awards are typically announced in early spring.

In 2022, DFO awarded a record \$8,640 (the third straight record-breaking year) to six research and education projects that ranged from building birding trails to studying the genome of the House Wren. Other recent past grants have included funding for student scholarships to local birding camps, graduate level ornithological research, and support of community development of birding resources. Individual grant awards typically range from \$500 to \$2,000.

DFO’s Grants Committee reminds members that as you renew your DFO membership for 2023, please consider donating to the fund. You can do so in the membership renewal process, or go separately to the [“DONATE TO DFO”](#) webpage.



DFO PEOPLE

In the Scope: Up close with Peter Ruprecht, rooted in the birding allures of Boulder County

Editor's note: IN THE SCOPE is a series of Q&As with DFO people — those who lead your field trips and others who volunteer and participate in the life of our club. Your feedback and nominations are welcome — email The Lark Bunting at patodrisk@gmail.com

Name:	Peter Ruprecht
Home city:	Superior
Age:	52
Occupation:	Mostly retired, previously in scientific computing support, CU Boulder

How/when I became a birder?

My family is really outdoorsy, so from an early age I was immersed in the natural world in the open country of southern Idaho. My dad is an enthusiastic birder and I picked up a general interest in birds just from the sparks of excitement flying off of him. He has a terrific knack for finding fun birds anywhere, like an Orchard Oriole at a highway rest area or a Hooded Merganser in a farm pond. I was fairly casual about birding for many years, with occasional bursts of greater zeal when I moved to places that had interesting new birds to learn about (e.g., spring warbler migration in Wisconsin, Appalachian woodland species in West Virginia, a whole new palette in England).

After my wife finished graduate school at CU in the 1990s, we decided to settle down in Colorado. About 10 years ago, I started trying to be more systematic in understanding bird ID and the relationship of birds with their habitats. That led me to volunteer for several surveys and monitoring programs in Boulder County. Through those, I have appreciated how spending significant time in a certain location gives me a sense of its daily and seasonal rhythms.

When/why I joined DFO?

For a long time, I didn't take advantage of local or state birding organizations — too hard to make an unpredictable work and family schedule mesh with groups' fixed calendars. (And any outfits with "Field Ornithologists" in their names seemed like they might be a little too professional and hard core . . .). Fortunately, I have had more spare time in the last few years. More importantly, I started birding with several people who clued me in that DFO's field trips and educational programs would be just right for a birder like me. I officially joined DFO in 2021 in order to qualify as a field trip leader.

First DFO trip I went on?

My first DFO field trip was to Bluff Lake in Denver on a very smoky, mid-summer morning. You wouldn't expect that to be prime birding conditions, but thanks to an expert leader and enthusiastic spotting by the participants we found a nice variety of species and even got to watch a pair of Swainson's Hawks and their fledglings.

Continued on page 20

How/why I became a trip leader?

Four or five years ago, one of my birding buddies was a regular trip leader for several local bird groups. He mentioned that he appreciated my insights when we were out together and suggested that others might as well. So I agreed to co-lead a few group outings and really enjoyed the overall energy. Those first few trips were stressful, though; I was nervous that I wouldn't be able to hold the group's interest or would fail to find and identify enough "good" birds. One of the surprising things I learned is that most trip participants aren't there to be impressed by the leader's intricate understanding of, say, the outer tertials of second-cycle gulls. Rather, they appreciate having a safe opportunity to ask questions, be inspired, and explore new places and ways of looking at birds. In 2021 I was recruited as a DFO trip leader and was very grateful for the formal training and mentoring process.

First field trip I led?

My initiation into leading DFO trips was on the [White Rocks Trail](#) east of Boulder. It's a can't-miss spot for a bird walk, with lots of different habitats and charismatic species like Bald Eagles and Wood Ducks. We even found a sapsucker that day!

Favorite place to go birding and why?

The interface between Great Plains and Rockies foothills delights me, especially in spots where a creek is transitioning between rushing and meandering. The Plainview Road area in northern Jefferson County and South Boulder Creek downstream from Eldorado Canyon are particular favorites.

My local patch, the [Mayhoffer-Singletree Trail](#) just west of Superior, is actually looking kind of patchy right now as a result of the Marshall Fire. The prairie areas seem to have bounced right back, but the brush and trees in the Coal Creek riparian corridor will need a longer recovery period. It'll be interesting to see how birds adjust to the habitat as it regrows.

My field trip philosophy/style/approach?

I like to bird in places that are beautiful and have interesting natural history. You will very rarely find me scoping a landfill! Thus, most of my field trips go to spots with nice views, varied habitats, intact native plant communities, etc. Fortunately, those kinds of areas also tend to be popular with birds.

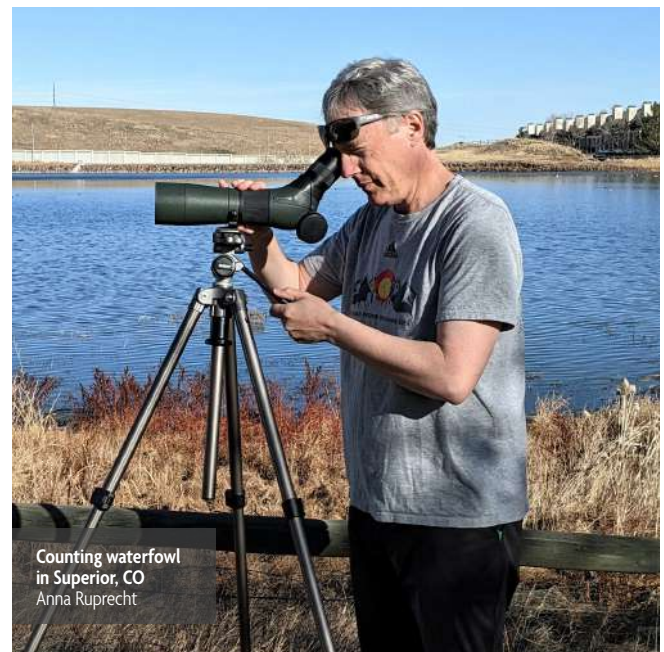
Also, I can get grouchy if I have to sit in the car for more than about 45 minutes, so in the interest of being a good-natured trip leader, I prefer to run outings that are close to home.

A place I'd like to go birding where I never have?

Last fall I experienced my first international birding trip (to Costa Rica) and was pop-eyed the whole time. Now I'm eager for another expedition to the neotropics. Ecuador sounds like it offers an incredible variety of habitats, each with its own diverse set of birds. Kind of like Boulder County times 10.

The next trip I'm leading?

One of my favorite birding spectacles is the winter raptor extravaganza in central Boulder County. The area bounded by Longmont, US 36, Boulder, and US 287 hosts an impressive number and diversity of hawks, eagles, and falcons. One time I had five species in my binoculars at once! So in January, **Donna Stumpp** and I will lead a trip starting at Lagerman Reservoir and cruising back roads through that area, including a stop at the justifiably famous Potato Hill. (What, you say you've *never heard* of Potato Hill?! It *may* appear an insignificant bump along North 49th Street near Rogers Road, but it has all the ingredients to attract birds of prey: big old cottonwoods, prairie dogs, starlings, long sunny ridges, and utility poles . . . plus some kind of invisible but irresistible raptor magic.)



Counting waterfowl
in Superior, CO
Anna Ruprecht

Club Quarterly: DFO business update

Editor's note: The Denver Field Ornithologists Board of Directors meets four times a year. The Lark Bunting is publishing this quarterly synopsis after the board's August, November, February and May meetings. Full minutes, financial reports and committee reports to the board will be available to members on the ["DFO BUSINESS" page](#).



DFO BOARD NOVEMBER MEETING

The quarterly meeting of the DFO Board took place on Nov. 16 via Zoom. Fifteen of the 16 directors and officers attended, along with two guests. The club budget for 2023 was the main topic of discussion. Minutes of the August meeting were approved. Committee report summaries, alphabetically, follow:



BETTER BIRDING SKILLS

Sharon Tinianow, acting committee chair, pointed out that a line item in the proposed budget — to pay an honorarium of \$75 for each episode of DFO's "Bird Bombs" bird ID mini-workshops — is problematic because presenter **David Suddjian** is also a board member and club leader.

DFO's Policy and Procedures Manual, updated and unanimously approved by the board in 2021, prohibits paying volunteers. Tinianow apologized for not remembering the policy — a foundational principle of our all-volunteer club — when the BBS Committee drafted its budget item earlier November. At that meeting, Suddjian had requested compensation for the time and effort required to develop each 30-minute session. (The suggested amount is one-half the typical honorarium for a monthly program.)

Board discussion touched on numerous points, among them: Stipends/honoraria for work not related to one's official DFO role; pros and cons of compensation in any form for volunteers in a nonprofit organization; potential conflict of interest for elected volunteers and leaders who oversee club activities and funds; payment work-arounds for expenses or to third-parties; and how other nonprofits such as Colorado Field Ornithologists deal with this topic.

With many questions, no board consensus, and a few other line-items in need of clarification, the board agreed that President **Susan Blansett** and Treasurer **Kathy Holland** would collaborate on a revised budget to be sent out after the Thanksgiving holiday for a vote via email.



COMMUNICATIONS & OUTREACH

C&O chair Tinianow reported that the committee's capacity to support DFO activities has reached its practical limit with no more than two events or programs per month, except in the evening-program-hiatus months of December, May, June and July. Unexpected and late-planned DFO activities tax C&O ability to provide effective promotion, event communications, and social media outreach. She urged committees not to add events that can overload C&O's plate in high-profile months, and also to take care not to cross-schedule events with those already scheduled by CFO.

In a written report, the committee detailed recent work, including: Phase-out of printed-paper version of DFO newsletter (final with December 2022 issue) and related design and content changes; outreach to new archivist at Denver Museum of Nature & Science (where DFO's archives reside); repair of online code error that shut down the DFO website for a few days in September; community outreach (Barr Lake Birding Festival); curation need for past-programs video archive; social media traffic (2,200 followers on Facebook, 651 on Instagram, both up over 2021) and need for new volunteer to handle Instagram posts; and plan to revise draft "rack card" to promote DFO at outreach events and in area birding stores and other venues.



CONSERVATION

Committee chair **Steve Ryder** asked the board to budget \$500 in 2023 to develop literature and other materials for planned "cats indoors" community education and outreach. Still in planning stages, this effort aims to curb bird mortality by countless free-roaming domestic felines. He said three experts on the issue are advising the committee on approaching the issue on policy and educational grounds, and distribution strategies for the materials and partnerships are in the works.

In a written report, Ryder detailed committee work from its Oct. 23 meeting on Zoom, including: Monitoring of bird-

Continued on page 20



DFO birders at Bear Creek Lake Park
Anne Craig

CLUB QUARTERLY *cont from page 19*

related topics involving Colorado Parks & Wildlife and the State Land Board (Xcel Energy utility-scale renewable energy projects and delivery infrastructure on Eastern Plains); Lights Out Denver fall migration education efforts; monitoring of “urban habitat improvement” (including possible “BioBlitz”) at defunct Park Hill Golf Course, focus of rezoning and efforts to re-develop site against Denver voter wishes (with another city-wide vote next spring); outreach to native plant/pollinator group working with Denver Parks & Rec at Washington Park; and community support regarding Wheat Ridge Open Space (Tabor Lake Trail) and Bear Creek Lake expansion.

FIELD TRIPS

Committee chair Suddjian previously presented a written report that highlighted the Nov. 12 Trip Leader Forum and a new milestone in 2022: Most DFO trips in a single year, 232 led and planned with a month and a half still remaining. The trip leader roster is now 37 certified leaders, with four new leader candidates to be trained and certified by late November. The program’s budget request for 2023 includes funds for helping defray trip leader expenses of overnight/out-of-state field trips in 2023. Suddjian also shared with the board a compilation of numerous replies and comments from a committee questionnaire sent to 325 recent participants in DFO field trips about their experiences, opinions and suggestions for the program.

FINANCE

Treasurer Holland reported that the DFO balance sheet as of November is at “net profit” for the year, an improvement over 2021. She said this may be due in part to increased funding this year for DFO’s Hawk Watch spring raptor migration program. DFO is ahead in income for 2022, but expenses also are higher. *(See budget details below and in final documents to be posted under meeting minutes online.)*

HAWK WATCH

Guest speaker **Janet Peters** of the Hawk Watch Committee said the program’s 2023 budget request seeks approximately \$10,000 for staffing to supervise the volunteer count. As in 2022, it would employ a full-time counter and provide for a part-time counter to support, especially on busy weekends but also when volunteers are scarce. She said the committee seeks to engage Michigan-based hawk-watching expert **Josh Haas** of [Hawks on the Wing](#) to provide advanced raptor ID training for returning volunteers. It also aims to repeat next year October’s successful live birds of prey program with Nature’s Educators. Other outreach to bring student field trips from minority and less-well-off schools to the ridge (school bus field trip costs are separate expenditures). The committee also secured unanimous approval of the board to reimburse some of Nature’s Educators’ expenses for the October 2022 raptor program.

Continued on page 21

GRANTS

Committee chair **Elaine Wagner** said her committee continues to recommend grant awards that total the amount of contributions during the previous year (2022 donations for 2023 grants, for instance), except if there is carryover money from in previous years. Holland noted there was a generous bump in the 2022 fund balance when an unnamed donor contributed \$3,000 to DFO's Research, Education & Conservation Grants Fund.

MEMBERSHIP

Blansett presented an update on DFO membership (in the absence of Membership chair **Sue Summers**, who resigned this fall). As of Nov. 15, DFO has 660 member households, 181 of whom have prepaid membership dues for 2023 and 43 for 2024. She also said nonmembers with DFO website accounts (required for field trip registration) total 1,268, though some may be inactive. Renewal reminders to all members went out in mid-November, and further reminders are going up on the DFO Facebook Group page and Instagram through December, when unrenewed memberships officially lapse. Some social media posts and emails also will suggest DFO memberships and DFO merchandise as holiday gifts.

DFO is seeking a new Membership chair with help from Nominations chair **Mary Geder**.

PROGRAMS

Programs manager **Bill Turner** said he is firming up the spring 2023 schedule of monthly evening programs, beginning with **Rich Beilfuss**, president and CEO of the International Crane Foundation for the Jan. 23 program. Discussion is still under way with three other potential presenters for the February and March programs, and the April program will be for reports and results from the 2022 Research, Education & Conservation Grants Fund awardees on their work. Tinianow called attention now to a scheduling conflict in September 2023, when the Jewish holy day of Yom Kippur falls on DFO's traditional fourth Monday meeting day. Turner said the program will be rescheduled for the third Monday that month.

NEW BUSINESS

2023 DFO Budget

In a document sent to the board before the meeting, Holland outlined a proposed 2023 budget with \$31,650 in income, more than half of it (\$18,650) in donations to DFO's three giving funds, and the rest in membership dues (\$13,000).

Expenses totaling \$23,973 would include Communications & Outreach (\$7,674) for *The Lark Bunting* newsletter production, website maintenance, Zoom and MailerLite online expenses and other printing and copying miscellany. Grant awards out of the Research, Education & Conservation follow (\$7,000), then Hawk Watch (\$6,000) and Miscellaneous categories (\$2,099).

That version of the budget predicted a surplus/carryover of \$7,677 at the end of 2023. Because of additional proposed changes to the budget as mentioned above, the present and treasurer will collaborate on a final draft of the 2023 budget for a DFO Board vote by email before the end of 2022.

NOTE: After further tweaking, the budget was adopted on Dec. 3 by a 12-1 board vote via email. The principal change was to remove the line item for payments for the "Bird Bombs" programs, discussed above.



Welcome to new DFO members

S. Kelly Ambler of Denver; Barb Archer, Denver; Ramesh and Suzanne Bhatt, Boulder; Deborah Bowman, Boulder; Jane Cates, Littleton; James and Linda Cherney, Wheat Ridge; Timothy Condon, Pine; Chase Crowson and Christian Duncan, Denver; Susanna Donato, Denver; Nancy Downs, Denver; Elizabeth Fischer, Denver; Curt Frankenfeld, Larkspur; Virginia Grady, Denver; Al Guarente, Media, PA; Diane Highbaugh, Englewood; Walt and Deb Jenkins, Thornton; Christina Jeske, Denver; Connie Johnson, Federal Heights; Rosanne Juergens, Centennial; Shirley Leow, Aurora; Winston Liu, Lafayette; Sean and Judy McKeon, Golden; Jessica Miller, Fountain; Kip Miller, Colorado Springs; Tom Mottinger, Elizabeth; Jane Olivier, Denver; Debra Palenik, Denver; Brandon Percival, Pueblo West; Fran Rulon-Miller, Salida; Charlie and Mary Saunders, Lakewood; Sheri S and Sheri Shimamoto, Littleton; Kate Shirley, Arvada; Helen Thorpe, Denver; Beverly and Fred Trail, Henderson; and Liz Willcockson, Denver Susanna Donato

Thank you for your contribution

Research, Education and Conservation Grants Fund

Yvonne Berg; Susan Blansett and Mark Peyton; Mary Cay and Tom Burger; Jodi Chambers and Sally Palmer; Jean and Charlie Curlee; Christopher Curwen; David and Mindy Densmore; Pamela Dowd; Gregg Goodrich and Ann Troth; Celia Greenman; David Hill; Sharon Hines; Paula Hoffman; Roy Hohn; Chuck Hundertmark and Marjorie Jannotta; Diane Hutton; Judy Lane; Debra Lentz; Debra Palenik; Linda Purcell and Billy A. Harris Jr.; Bob Righter; Karen Rosica; Danny Roohr and Betsy Shaw; Peter Stoltz; Kenna Sue Trickey; Suzanne and Bill Wuerthele

Friends of DFO

Yvonne Berg; Karen Clark; Christopher Curwen; Pamela Dowd; Jodi Chambers and Sally Palmer; John Drummond; Gregg Goodrich and Ann Troth; Newell Grant; Julia Gwinn; David Hill; Roy Hohn; Chuck Hundertmark and Marjorie Jannotta; Debra Lentz; Sean and Judy McKeon; Pepe Mendez; Debra Palenik; Bob Righter; Charlie and Mary Saunders; Nancy and Bob Stocker; Rob and Michele Worrall; Suzanne and Bill Wuerthele

DFO's Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch

Yvonne Berg; Susan Blansett and Mark Peyton; Jodi Chambers and Sally Palmer; Susan Clasen; Pamela Dowd; Gregg Goodrich and Ann Troth; David Hill; Roy Hohn; Chuck Hundertmark and Marjorie Jannotta; Diane Hutton; Debra Lentz; Pepe Mendez; Debra Palenik; Bob Righter; Janet Shin, and Suzanne and Bill Wuerthele



LAST LOOK, LAST WORD

The bird who came for Christmas (maybe), New Year's (possibly), and well beyond

Is it really almost a *year* since that unexpected “desert cardinal” of the Southwest brightened our birding in Denver’s midwinter of 2021-22?

Officially, eBird logs this first Pyrrhuloxia in Denver County as Feb. 11, 2022, just the species’ sixth record in Colorado. Neighborhood hearsay suggests the bird may have been around a month or longer before birders found it.

Its improbable sanctuary for the next five weeks was a weedy back-alley lot in Denver’s West Colfax neighborhood, two-and-a-half blocks from the light rail station and just 10 minutes southwest of downtown.

Yes, you could *commute* to this rare Colorado lifer. Scores of us did. The day after its discovery, DFO member **Rob Raker** trekked over from Lakewood to take the snowy photos. Two weeks later, he returned for more. With thanks to Rob, enjoy this beautiful holiday gift from *The Lark Bunting*.



Top left: Pyrrhuloxia in snow
Bottom: Daily MOB at stakeout
Next page: Pyrrhuloxia in profile
Rob Raker



Until the next Lark Bunting . . .

GOOD HOLIDAY BIRDING!



THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 59 | ISSUE 02-03 | FEBRUARY-MARCH 2023

DFOBIRDS.ORG

FIELD TRIPPING

2022's record year: 20+ trips
a month, 5 a week!

PAGE 8

BIRDING ESSAY

Waddaya mean: Canada
Geese used to be *rare*?

PAGE 15

HAWK WATCH

Already setting up for
spring 2023 migration

PAGE 14

LAST LOOK / LAST WORD

City Park goose tale:
Gandalf and his "mom"

PAGE 20

dfo
DENVER FIELD
ORNITHOLOGISTS



Winter Wren
Robert Raker
Bear Creek Greenbelt
Lakewood



Robert Raker, a DFO member since 2014, is a former

environmental scientist, adventurer and filmmaker on many expeditions around the world. Now retired, he still goes rock-climbing and skiing.

ON THE COVER

Winter Wren? The name says so, that's why

The first time I learned there was a “winter” wren, I wondered how and why it got its name. It couldn't be color; nothing icy or frosty about that typically brownish wren hue. Maybe some esoteric behavioral connection to the cold and snowy season?

The answer turns out to be about as straightforward as it gets: When it's winter in the East, the bird shows up. Most Winter Wrens breed in the damp forests of eastern Canada and northeastern US, then drift south into winter range across the eastern half of the country. In Colorado, where they are “very rare” visitors in any season, eBird data show that winter is also when more of our occasional sightings occur (and there have been a number so far this season).

Our cover bird for the February-March issue of *The Lark Bunting* was seen about two years ago by DFO member **Rob Raker**, a frequent photo contributor. Rob captured his appropriately ice-filled image in Lakewood's Bear Creek Greenbelt on Feb. 22, 2021.

For the record, pioneering American-Scottish ornithologist **Alexander Wilson** (he of the warbler and the phalarope, considered the “father of American ornithology”) first described and illustrated the bird in 1808. But it looked so close to the familiar Eurasian Wren that he puzzled whether it was newly distinct or just a subspecies. Eleven years later (and four years after Wilson's death), French ornithologist **Louis Jean Pierre Vieillot** went with Winter Wren (*Troglodytes hiemalis*). He coined its scientific name from two Greek and Latin words that translate to “Cave dweller of winter” — a nod to wrens' habit of taking cover and hunting for insects in crevices, cavities and undergrowth.

Still, it took until the age of DNA to definitively distinguish the Winter Wren and its West Coast lookalike Pacific Wren as separate species from their Euro cousin. Subsequent song and genetics studies where their ranges overlap further separated Winter and Pacific from each other as distinct species.

When we see Winter Wrens, they're usually bouncing around near streams, tails straight up, tiny and skittering like mice in search of food among downed tree limbs and undergrowth. Their call has been likened to a squeaky bark, like that of a Song Sparrow. Although we never see it here, Winter Wren males build several nests before pairing up with a mate and leading her around to choose the one.

Cool wren fact: Winter Wren (our smallest wren, BTW) and every other North American wren are among more than 80 wren species across the Americas — vs. only one wren in the rest of the world (yes, the Eurasian).

Population surveys suggest Winter Wren numbers are stable or even increasing. But further fragmentation of forests and more-than-partial logging pose threats. The species' reliance on old-growth forests for nesting suggests sensitivity to “forest management” — from forest-floor clearing to clearcutting of tracts in the species' breeding range. Cornell's *Birds of the World* notes that an extensive 1999 study found Winter Wrens in the Rocky Mountains two times more abundant in forests labeled “old-growth” than in those classified merely as “mature.”

There's probably a moral to the story in there somewhere about the perils of old-growth forest “*wrenewal*,” but I'll leave it at that.

— **Patrick O'Driscoll**



IN THIS ISSUE

- 2 On the Cover**
Winter Wren? The name says so, that's why
- 5 From the President**
With 2023, self-renewal through birding
- 6 DFO News**
DFO News Notes
- 8 Field Trips**
Field trips in 2022? You might say DFO had a few . . . a few RECORDS
- 9 Program Previews**
New winter-spring lineup: Cranes, grouse, Cooper's Hawks
- 14 Hawk Watch**
Rapt for raptors? Hawk Watch 2023 almost here!
- 17 Birder Essay**
A birding memory: When geese were rare
- 19 New Members, Contributions**
- 20 Last Look, Last Word**
A City Park goose tale: Meeting Gandalf's "mom"

The Lark Bunting newsletter of Denver Field Ornithologists is published online monthly at dfobirds.org except for joint issues in July–August and February–March.

PUBLICATION STAFF

Editor

Patrick O'Driscoll

Assistant Editor

Mike Fernandez

Photo Editor

Jim Esten

Layout and Design

Jennie Dillon

Contributors this issue

Susan Blansett, Rob Raker, Jared Del Rosso, Tom Wilberding, Janet Peters, Anne Craig, Allison Peters

CONTRIBUTE TO THE NEWSLETTER

Submit original articles or story ideas to the editor at patodrisk@gmail.com. Send image-file photos of birds or bird outings to the photo editor at jcesten@gmail.com.

Editors reserve the right to accept and edit suitable articles and photos for publication.

NEWSLETTER ADVERTISING

The Lark Bunting does not accept or contain paid advertising. DFO **AdBIRDtisements** are FREE to club members to seek or sell bird-related equipment, supplies, books and decorative items (artwork, photos, clothing, note cards, etc.).

- Ads must include name, email and/or telephone number, and may include weblink if items offered online
- Ads may be edited for inappropriate content or excessive length (125-word limit); ONE photo or image per ad
- Ads do not carry over each month. To renew, resubmit by next deadline
- Available *only* to DFO members
- Deadline: last day of month except January and June (*The Lark Bunting* does not publish in February and July)

Send AdBIRDtisement materials to editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com.

Next deadline: Tuesday, Feb. 28



A community of birders, learning and acting together for avian wildlife

Denver Field Ornithologists is an all-volunteer organization that conducts hundreds of free birdwatching field trips throughout the year and welcomes participation and membership by all. DFO promotes enjoyment of nature, the study of birds, and protection of them and their habitats in greater Denver and beyond.

In addition to field trips, evening programs and birding workshops, DFO conducts community science in the field, including the spring Hawk Watch raptor migration count on Dinosaur Ridge.

DFO awards grants for bird-related research, education and conservation projects in Colorado.

DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and financial contributions to DFO's three giving funds are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

DFO OFFICERS

President

Susan Blansett
susan.blansett@gmail.com

Vice President

Sharon Tinianow
sharontinianow@gmail.com

Secretary (interim)

Nathan Bond
dfobirds.secretary@gmail.com

Treasurer

Kathy Holland
kcloudview@comcast.net

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Mary Cay Burger
mcburger3@juno.com

Karen Drozda
drozforte@aol.com

Mary Geder
mfg5000@live.com

Tina Jones
tjcalliope@hotmail.com

Roger Koester
koester1949@gmail.com

Patrick O'Driscoll
patodrisk@gmail.com

Steve Ryder
cedarmesa@yahoo.com

David Suddjian
dsuddjian@gmail.com

Bill Turner
toursbyturner@aol.com

Elaine Wagner
eWagner1000@yahoo.com

COMMITTEE CHAIRS AND ROLES

Better Birding Skills

Sharon Tinianow (acting)
sharontinianow@gmail.com

Communications & Outreach

Sharon Tinianow
sharontinianow@gmail.com

Conservation

Steve Ryder
cedarmesa@yahoo.com

Field Trips

David Suddjian
david suddjian@gmail.com

Finance

Roger Koester
koester1949@gmail.com

Grants

Elaine Wagner
eWagner1000@yahoo.com

Hawk Watch

David Hill
davidhill2357@gmail.com

Membership

VACANT

Nominations

Mary Geder
mfg5000@live.com

Programs Director

Bill Turner
toursbyturner@aol.com

Historian

Kristine Haglund
kahaglund1@aol.com

Web Administrator

Jim Esten
admin@dfobirds.org

Zoom Coordinator

Peter Stoltz
dfobirds.zoom@gmail.com

DFO ONLINE

Website

dfobirds.org

Facebook Group

facebook.com/groups/dfobirds

Instagram

instagram.com/denverfieldornithologists

CONTACT

Email

dfocommsgroup@gmail.com

Via website

dfobirds.org

Located at the bottom of the homepage

US Mail

Attn: Kathy Holland,
Treasurer, DFO
351 E Caley Ave
Centennial, CO 80121-2201

LEARN MORE

Membership — Join or Renew

dfobirds.org/DFO/Membership

Field Trips — Explore / Sign Up

dfobirds.org/FieldTrips.aspx

Volunteering

dfobirds.org/DFO/Volunteer.aspx

Charitable Giving

dfobirds.org/DFO/Donations.aspx

DFO Merch Store

zazzle.com/store/official_dfo_shop



FROM THE PRESIDENT

With 2023, self-renewal through birding

Ah, winter in Colorado – what’s not to love? Yes, our weather has been a little severe lately, and with climate change, it seems to be getting more extreme regardless of season. But when my siblings in Florida and the Carolinas brag about their warm winters, I happily reply to their texts with photos of my busy backyard birdfeeders under 10 inches of snow, as many as 15 species coming and going like crowds at Grand Central Station. Chilly fingers notwithstanding, winter here can be a wonderfully peaceful time to be birding.

As a typical Capricorn — stubborn as a goat, but also ambitious and hard-working — I sometimes find it hard to relax. But the thing that transports me away from all that is being outdoors, with binoculars around my neck. Whether in the stillness of soft snowfall or the snap of a sunny winter day, my whole body relaxes, senses focused only on nature and the sight and sounds of birds. Inevitably, I wear a smile. Can’t help it, it’s pure joy.

Contrary to the well-ordered, self-improving stereotype of my Zodiac sign, I’ve never been much for New Year’s resolutions. But this year, admitting to myself that I had neglected my own birding and self-care for months, I resolved to focus on a singular goal: More time spent birding in 2023. That includes sharpening my skills and embracing the camaraderie of fellow birders like you and DFO. Happily, keeping this resolution will mean indulging another neglected hobby: reading.

On New Year’s morning, I went straight to my bookshelf to pull down two forgotten but valued guides to finding birds in Colorado and surrounding states: [Seasonal Guide to The Natural Year](#) by **Ben Guterson**, and [Birding Around the Year](#) by **Aileen Lotz**. As a birthday gift to myself, I also bought two books by local authors that I expect will improve my skills and lead me to explore unknown or overlooked hotspots: [How to Know the Birds](#) by **Ted Floyd** of Lafayette, and [The Best Front Range Bird Hikes](#) by DFO’s own **Norm Lewis**.

Already on DFO’s calendar are great birding resources our volunteers have lined up for this winter: monthly speakers (recruited by **Bill Turner**) and **David Suddjian**’s “Bird Bombs” mini-webinars on bird ID. And there’s the upcoming spring

season of DFO’s [Hawk Watch at Dinosaur Ridge](#) to sharpen raptor ID skills. More time in the field means more time to spend with the eBird and Merlin apps. I look forward to getting better with these popular, powerful tech tools for birding. With almost no end to the resources and learning available to birders, I want to take advantage of them all.



Blansett at Hawktober live raptor event in 2022
Patrick O'Driscoll

One more thing: Although I became a DFO field trip leader in fall of 2021, I led only two outings in all of 2022. I intend to correct that embarrassing lapse this year, with a new winter trip soon and at least one for spring. That one, though, will be after DFO’s annual election in April. That’s when **Sharon Tinianow**, your brilliant and dedicated DFO vice president, is expected to succeed me as club president. That’s also when I become immediate *past* president, with much more time to lead field trips.

DFO has taken succession planning and leadership development seriously for a long time. Having a corps of willing, capable volunteers is key for a strong nonprofit organization like ours. The names you see mentioned throughout this newsletter show how blessed we are with talented volunteers.

So thank you to every volunteer who has served in this organization, then and now. What fun, and what an honor, to work with you on behalf of all in DFO and for the birds we love. May the new year bring you as much joy as you continue to bring to me.

See you in the field . . . I promise!

— **Susan Blansett**

DFO News Notes

Got blurbs on birds? Share with **DFO News Notes**: Colorado birding newsbits, eBird milestones, tales from the trail, birding life (and life birds!), etc. Send items, photos and any questions to newsletter editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com.

DID YOU REMEMBER TO RENEW YOUR DFO MEMBERSHIP?

If you missed our series of “DFO: It’s ALL of us” membership renewal reminders in the past four issues of *The Lark Bunting*, here’s one more reminder: Your membership may have EXPIRED. Don’t wait for our Membership Committee to come calling with more reminders. Renew TODAY!

[Click here](#) to join or renew your membership via the DFO webpage. Membership remains a tremendous bargain — just \$25 a year for a family membership, and \$10 for a student membership (age 26 and under). Your modest fee enables Denver Field Ornithologists to provide monthly programs and field trips free of charge, support avian research, conservation and education, and publish this, our official newsletter. So if your membership is off-course, rejoin the flock!



BOMBS AWAY: EVEN MORE MINI-WEBINARS ON BIRD ID!

The new year brings three “Bird Bombs” Zoom mini-webinars on bird identification this winter. New on the schedule are:

Feb. 9, 7 p.m.: “Where’s *That* on the Bird?” focuses on bird topography and the names of bird parts you need to know. [Click here to register.](#)

March 9, 7 p.m.: “Colorado Blues” will discuss identification of our three bluebird species. [Click here to register.](#)

Already on the schedule and next up is “**Mountain Finches**,” **Thursday, Jan. 12 at 7 p.m.** Besides Colorado’s trio of rosy-finches (Gray-crowned, Brown-capped and Black), this session includes Evening Grosbeak, Pine Grosbeak, Red Crossbill and Cassin’s Finch (that last species making an unexpectedly widespread appearance around metro Denver this winter). [Click here to register.](#) And don’t forget: Past “Bird Bombs” sessions are archived for viewing on the DFO website’s “[Past Programs](#)” page.



NEW AUTO PAY/RENEW PASS FOR STATE PARKS ENTRY NOW AVAILABLE

Beginning in 2023, getting your Colorado state parks pass is as automatic as renewing your motor vehicle registration — because that’s how and where it’s done. The new [Keep Colorado Wild Pass](#) costs \$29, about one-third of what an annual parks entry pass used to cost. The fee is now tied to your motor vehicle renewal.

Although the charge is an automatic line item when each car, pickup truck, RV or motorcycle registration comes up, you can decline the park pass fee when you renew your vehicle in person, online, by kiosk or mail. Because the pass is non-transferable between vehicles, the charge applies to every vehicle. Owners of more than one can decide whether to opt in or out for each as registration renewals come up. But in place of the previous \$120 family pass that could be used between vehicles, \$29 per vehicle compares well for most.

After you renew, the Colorado Parks & Wildlife logo is printed on your vehicle registration card, which also becomes your entry pass. And you can use it if you enter a state park on foot or bicycle, too. Don’t own a car? You can buy a non-vehicle version of the same \$29 pass online or at a state park or local CPW office. Other questions? [Click here](#) for CPW’s frequently asked questions on the new pass.

Continued on page 7

COLORADO'S AVIAN FLU OUTBREAK: EYES ON EAGLES, HAWKS, OWLS

Although wild birds have been spared the worst of the national outbreak of avian influenza, it has still killed thousands of waterfowl and infected nearly three dozen birds of prey in Colorado. Wildlife authorities fear Bald Eagles and other species that scavenge carcasses of infected geese could contract and die of the flu, too.

Effects on commercial, domestic and “backyard” poultry were evident late last winter. Colorado egg producers have been hammered, losing upwards of 6.1 million chickens, according to the [Colorado Department of Agriculture's tally](#) of avian flu cases. Nationally, almost 58 million mostly commercial birds in 47 states have been infected.

EDITOR'S NOTE

We'll be right back . . .

This, our February-March issue, is the second newsletter of the calendar year 2023. It also marks the start of *The Lark Bunting's* annual mid-winter timeout to re-charge, re-tool, rest and renew.

We'll return from our break with more stories, photos, essays, columns and reviews with the April issue of *The Lark Bunting* (coming out in the first half of February).

Thank you for your readership and interest over the past year. Got an idea, a suggestion, a great photo, or something else worthwhile for *your* club newsletter? Let us know! We grow and thrive on your feedback, whether you love us, hate us, or somewhere in between. Drop me an email at patodrisk@gmail.com and tell me how we can do our job better for you.

Have you read a new bird-related book? Write us a review. Gone on a great field trip and want to tell more about it (and share your photos)? Bring it on!

In short: Share with us *your* vision for *The Lark Bunting*. I'm all ears.

Until we return, good 2023 birding!

— **Patrick O'Driscoll**, editor

As of late December, Colorado counted about 4,700 wild bird victims. All but about 100 were in three die-offs in migrant Snow Goose flocks in November and early December: 2,000 each in Morgan and Logan counties, and about 600 in Prowers County. But remaining victims included 35 raptors, including 15 Great Horned Owls, a dozen Red-tailed Hawks, five Bald Eagles and three Turkey Vultures.

The rest — about 70 spread among a dozen other species — were all water birds and mostly geese and ducks, except for a crow and a gull.

Michael Tincher, rehab coordinator for the Rocky Mountain Raptor program in Fort Collins, suggest a significant segment of the nation's birding community hasn't reacted with alarm because avian flu “is not impacting songbird populations. This hasn't helped to get the word out to the community as a whole.”

For a recent overview, read “[Worst Colorado avian flu outbreak kills bald eagles, threatens more wild birds](#)” in *The Colorado Sun* online news service.

JAN. 15 DEADLINE: TEEN SCHOLARSHIPS TO HOG ISLAND BIRD CAMP

Boulder County Audubon is sponsoring teenaged Colorado birders and aspiring ornithologists to a June 18-23 summer coastal bird studies camp next summer at National Audubon's renowned Hog Island Audubon Camp in Maine. Scholarship applications for two remaining openings are due by Jan. 15, 2023. Boulder Audubon says many recipients of these scholarships have gone on to careers in ornithology and wildlife biology. Any young Colorado birder age 15-17 can apply. Complete details and application forms are at <https://www.boulderaudubon.org/bird-camp-scholarships>. For a glimpse of the program, go to Hog Island Camp's [Coastal Maine Bird Studies for Teens webpage](#). More questions? Contact Boulder County Audubon at scholarship@boulderaudubon.org.



Bald Eagle scavenging goose carcass (Patrick O'Driscoll)



FIELD TRIPS

Field trips in 2022? You might say DFO had a few . . . a few RECORDS

Patrick O'Driscoll

For Denver Field Ornithologists, the emphasis in 2022 was definitely on (and in) the FIELD. An end-of-year tally by DFO Field Trip chair **David Suddjian** shows our club smashed the old record of 222 trips in a single year (our year-long group Big Year effort in 2018) by a whopping 12 percent, with 248 total trips.

Not surprising, you say? After all, field trips have always been DFO's prime activity, right? But run the numbers and they're something to celebrate: More than 20 trips each *month*, averaging 4.8 trips each *week*. On New Year's Eve, Suddjian led a crowd of 19 other participants on DFO's final field trip of the year, a late-morning waterfowl walk through the snow at South Platte Park in Littleton. (That trip, BTW, was David's 300th since becoming a trip leader himself.)



Field Trips chair David Suddjian leads last outing of 2022 on New Year's Eve
Anne Craig

More than 500 individuals participated in at least one DFO field trip in 2022, another record (previous high: 419 in 2019). One trip participant, **Joe Chen** of Denver, was our most "frequent flier": He went on 88 field trips last year, 30 more than the next closest. Joe is best known to DFO Facebook followers as that guy who, within hours after most trips, paints and posts a portrait of a bird species he saw on the outing.

Involvement by those who lead trips also rose. As the ranks of certified trip leaders grew in 2022 with more newly trained individuals, 39 leaders led at least one or more trips each. Those trips visited 52 of Colorado's 64 counties, three of them for the first time.

Eyes and ears on those trips recorded 331 bird species in 2022, our second-highest tally after 361 species in 2018. Eight of them were new for DFO's own club "life list." The top 10 counties by species count last year on DFO field trips were: Jefferson, Douglas, Pueblo, Adams, Arapahoe, El Paso, Boulder, Park, Bent and Kiowa.

Finally, DFO trips in 2022 resulted in 1,356 complete eBird checklists, second only to DFO's Big Year 2018, with 1,627 checklists.

"The year was exceptional in other regards," Suddjian noted. "Sign-up system changes, accessibility to open trips, variety of trips, new leaders added, and number of newer birders attending."

And stand by: The list of new DFO field trips for 2023 is growing. Here we go . . .



Cranes: Ambassadors for Conservation

Rich Beilfuss

Monday, January 23

7 p.m. MST via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

With deep cultural connections, extraordinary beauty and striking behaviors, Cranes are among the most loved and revered birds on earth. Tall, stately and heart-stoppingly charismatic, they are nonetheless also among the most endangered families of birds. Eleven of the globe's 15 species are threatened or endangered, and our own North American examples reflect both the plentiful (Sandhill) and the few (Whooping).

Since 1973, the [International Crane Foundation](#) has advocated for them and other crane species found across Africa, East Asia, Southeast Asia and Europe. The foundation, whose mission in part is “to conserve cranes and the ecosystems, watersheds and flyways on which they depend,” also works with local partners in more than 50 countries to rear new generations of the rarest cranes.

DFO's first evening program of the new year features **Rich Beilfuss**, foundation president and CEO, who will explore the role of cranes as ambassadors and flagships for conservation, bringing people together to save some of the most important wetlands on earth. He will share stories about long-term efforts to combat climate change, reduce water stress, and improve community livelihoods around endangered crane populations in Africa and Asia. He also will share lessons learned in North America from the successful recovery of Whooping Cranes from the brink of extinction, and efforts to secure Sandhill Cranes and biodiversity in agricultural landscapes.

Beilfuss, who has headed the foundation since 2010, works from its headquarters in Baraboo, WI, which serves as a global center for crane conservation leadership and training. The foundation employs more than 125 staff and associates, with offices in five other countries and Texas.

A licensed professional hydrologist with a Ph.D. in wetland ecology, Beilfuss has worked on water management and wetlands restoration to benefit cranes in more than 20 countries across Africa and Asia, focusing on Nepal, Vietnam, Mozambique and Zambia. He also has contributed to restoration and management of thousands of acres of prairie and savanna landscapes in the US Midwest.

The International Crane Foundation's focus on conservation of North America's endangered Whooping Crane population is featured in a 14-minute video, [Cranes: Symbols of Survival](#), narrated by longtime NBC News anchor, **Tom Brokaw**.

[Click here](#) to register for this free Jan. 23 webinar. You'll receive a link and subsequent reminder to connect to Beilfuss's program.





Daly Edmunds

Greater Sage-Grouse: Largest Conservation Effort in US History

Daly Edmunds
Monday, February 27
7 p.m. MST via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

The Greater Sage-Grouse is found in Colorado and across 10 other western states in North America's largest but often overlooked ecosystem. Largely inconspicuous except when males aggregate in remote courtship leks to strut and display for mates, this species was once so prevalent that it fed many pioneers during their grueling journeys through the West.

Today, with most of these iconic birds of the sagebrush steppes found on public lands, they have become a political football. In DFO's monthly evening program for February, **Daly Edmunds** of [Audubon Rockies](#) will discuss the political intrigue that has plagued sage-grouse management. She will also review the threats to sage-grouse habitat and share the latest science on the species.

Edmunds is director of policy and outreach for Audubon Rockies, National Audubon's Fort Collins-based regional office for Colorado, Wyoming and Utah. In this role, she is responsible for furthering the organization's [Sagebrush Ecosystem Initiative](#), which works regionally to conserve the high, dry western habitat on which more than 350 wild species depend. The initiative convenes citizens, industry, government and non-government organizations to find ways to balance the needs of people and birds.

An [alarming new report](#) in September by the U.S. Geological Survey found a staggering 1.3 million acres of sagebrush habitat are being lost annually. Sagebrush was once the most widespread vegetation type across western North America. Now only half of it is left, and new demands continue to be placed on it.

Daly earned her master's degree from the University of Wyoming, studying pronghorn movement patterns. Before joining Audubon in 2009, she worked for the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, National Wildlife Federation, and Wyoming Wildlife Federation.

[Click here](#) to register for this free Feb. 27 webinar. You'll receive a link and subsequent reminders to connect to Edmunds' program as the date nears.



Fighting sage-grouse males (Elizabeth Boehm, Audubon Photography Awards)



Alyssa Davidge
Claire Harris

How Historical Redlining Led Denver's Cooper's Hawks to Live Where They Do

Alyssa Davidge
Monday, March 27
7 p.m. MDT via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

Once known as a feared and artful raptor mainly in the deciduous and mixed forests of rural and wildlands America, the Cooper's Hawk has pioneered outward to become a regular resident of urban and suburban landscapes since the 1970s. Cornell's *Birds of the World* calls it "likely the most common backyard breeding raptor across North America."

The species' remarkably successful adaptation to urban environments like Denver's is predicated chiefly on forest conditions in the neighborhoods where we find (and enjoy seeing) it. Designed by nature to maneuver swiftly through robust woodlands in pursuit of its prey, Cooper's is most comfortable where the trees are mature and numerous.

Alyssa Davidge, the Denver raptor biologist who will present March's provocatively titled program, finds it no coincidence that those places are neighborhoods intentionally favored by the historically segregationist "redlining" housing policies that date to the 1930s. One of those practices was "redlining," which made mortgage loans unavailable or unaffordable to people of color in the predominantly minority neighborhoods where they were largely confined by segregation.

How does racism affect wildlife? Davidge says she will explore "how Cooper's Hawks use Denver" and how land management of the city because of redlining policies "may play a role in (the birds') decisions." She will examine current Cooper's Hawk occupancy in redlined neighborhoods and other land attributes across the city "to explore the effect of historical policies on today's urban raptors." Her presentation is subtitled, "Impacts of Historic Redlining Policy on Wildlife Habitat and Cooper's Hawk Occupancy."

Davidge is a second-year master's student in the University of Colorado Denver's Integrative Biology Department. Before returning to graduate school, she was a condor biologist with the Peregrine Fund, managing the California Condor population on the North Rim of the Grand Canyon. She also worked several seasons banding terns and plovers for the San Diego Zoo's Conservation Research Institute, conserving spotted owl populations in the Sierra Nevada, and monitoring migratory birds for HawkWatch International and Cape May Raptor Banding Project in Washington, New Mexico, and New Jersey. Her current focus is on smarter policy decisions for the future of conservation and biodiversity. She hopes to become a wildlife biologist, with a raptor focus, for Colorado Parks & Wildlife, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, or the U.S. Geological Survey.

[Click here](#) to register for this free Mar. 27 webinar. You'll receive a link and subsequent reminders to connect to Davidge's program as the date nears.



Alyssa Davidge and Cooper's Hawk (Brian Millsap)



WINTER / SPRING PROGRAM PREVIEWS

Birdsong and Habitats: Updates from DFO-funded Avian Research

Leah Crenshaw, Olivia Taylor
Monday, April 24
7 p.m. MST via Zoom

The final installment in the winter-spring series of DFO monthly Zoom webinar programs (co-sponsored by Denver Public Library) will be a kind of show-and-tell session with recipients of grants in 2022 from the Denver Field Ornithologists' Research, Education and Conservation Fund.

At least two of the six recipients of grants in 2022 will present updates on their research at this program. All grant winners agree to report back to the DFO membership in one of three ways: An article in *The Lark Bunting* newsletter, a DFO field trip planned around the theme and field location of the research, or an oral presentation at the April membership meeting, usually an evening gathering via webinar.

In this case, two of those who will present on April 24 are studying and analyzing birdsong in Colorado, but in different birds in very different habitats: Western Meadowlarks in the Pawnee National Grasslands, and Black-capped Chickadees in canyons above Boulder.

The grasslands researcher is **Leah Crenshaw**, a master's thesis student in the School of Biological Sciences at the University of Northern Colorado in Greeley. She is analyzing grassland birdsong to determine the effect human landscape development has on birds' breeding success. Other previous studies have shown the effect on avian abundance and diversity. But in her [grant application narrative](#), Crenshaw said "a notable research gap exists" in determining what effect landscape changes may have on birds' individual behaviors and fitness. Her research is against a backdrop of three-quarters of North American grassland bird species in decline.

Her DFO-funded work seeks to provide new insights into what forces underpin population changes in grassland birds so as to improve conservation of those in Colorado. Crenshaw also aims to offer land managers "data useful to promoting diversity and abundance on their properties."

The other birdsong research presenter is **Olivia Taylor**, a student in the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at the University of Colorado Boulder. Her focus is on measuring the effects of geographic isolation on differences in song between populations of Black-capped Chickadees as a way to understand further how isolation influences birdsong evolution.

In her [grant application narrative](#), Taylor noted the critical importance of birdsong for recognition within species, defense of territories and mating. "Much like human language, bird song is learned at a young age through exposure to parents or other neighboring adults," she wrote. She aims to explore the effects of canyons as "isolating mechanisms that drive song evolution." Her hypothesis: With lack of exposure to outside individual birds and less "cultural flow," the songs of populations isolated by canyons "will diverge," and divergence will increase with distance between those populations.

Look for more details and a link to register for this April 24 Zoom program in the next issue of *The Lark Bunting*.

Oops: No November program review after all



Because of production issues, our planned review of the Nov. 28 DFO evening program — "Hawk Watch 2022: Looking Back and Forward" with field counter and coordinator **Emma Riley** — will not appear.

We had postponed it because the Nov. 28 presentation fell too close to *The Lark Bunting's* deadline for the newsletter in December.

If you did not see the presentation live on Zoom, you can view the program recording on the DFO ["Past Programs"](#) webpage.

HAWK WATCH

Rapt for raptors? Hawk Watch 2023 almost here!

Janet Peters

Wait — spring already? Yes, it's just two months until the official March 1 start of DFO's annual Hawk Watch raptor count, and there's no time like the present to prepare. Who's ready to volunteer?

The 11-week counting season for migrating birds of prey along Dinosaur Ridge in Jefferson County will run through May 14. Now is the time to consider helping with the spring count, one of dozens of community science counts on raptor migration routes across the country. DFO's Hawk Watch team has scheduled events for prospective and returning volunteers (*to apply, see link at the end of this article*), and for any and all looking to improve their raptor identification skills:

Hawk Watch volunteer orientation

Saturday, Feb. 25 (time TBA)

A field trip to our viewing platform atop Dinosaur Ridge, led by experienced hawk watchers. Look for the trip listing on the [DFO Upcoming Field Trips](#) page soon.

Advanced Hawks on the Wing training

Wednesday, March 1, 6:30 p.m. MST via Zoom

Subtitled "Seeing beyond the field marks with flight-based identification," this session with nationally known photographer, videographer, and educator **Josh Haas** features live video and side-by-side comparisons of hawk species seen on Dinosaur Ridge in spring migration. This enhancement of the introductory training is essential to helping volunteers better assist in the spring count. [Click here to register](#) for this 90-minute webinar.

In addition, the team has scheduled a meeting for new and returning Hawk Watch volunteers for **Wednesday, Feb. 22, 7 p.m. MST via Zoom**. **Dave Hill**, chair of DFO's Hawk Watch Committee, will lead this session. It's guaranteed to enhance ID skills and give interested volunteers a taste of what Hawk Watch volunteering is about. (*A link to join this meeting will be sent to new and returning volunteers.*)

DFO's 2022 chief hawk counter, **Emma Riley**, is returning for 2023 and will oversee the daily count on the ridge on Wednesdays through Sundays. But she'll need more eyes and ears to ensure full coverage of hawk, eagle, falcon and vulture movements through the season. Not only do volunteers spot and identify raptors — they also introduce hikers on Dinosaur Ridge to birding and the excitement of seeing birds of prey in flight up close.

To apply to be a volunteer, and for more information about DFO Hawk Watch at Dinosaur Ridge, visit the [Hawk Watch page](#) on the Denver Field Ornithologists website. If you have additional questions, you can also email DFO's Hawk Watch coordinators directly: **Dave Hill** at davidhill2357@gmail.com and **Janet Peters** at j.f.peters58@gmail.com.



Watching on Dinosaur Ridge in 2022
Allison Peters



Winter flocks on Ferril Lake
in Denver City Park
Patrick O'Driscoll

BIRDER ESSAY

A birding memory: When geese were rare

Tom Wilberding

As I write this, it's the first day of winter in Denver. Canada and Cackling Geese are everywhere — in city and state parks, on frozen ponds and open reservoirs, munching bluegrass on ball fields and golf courses, and loafing on suburban and urban lawns, their green poop speckling the sidewalks.

Too many geese, really, but I remember when there were almost none. Do you?

Come back with me to 1957 and a dreary, post-Thanksgiving weekend in Detroit. I am 10 years old, in the back seat of the family station wagon. My parents are taking me and my three siblings on a Sunday drive after church. We are crossing the Ambassador Bridge over the Detroit River and into Canada.

"Can you hear it yet?" my sister Karen asks.

"No, not yet," I reply, "but soon, any minute, I'm sure."

"Oh, hear that? We're getting close now."

"Look! Here they are. Wow! Amazing!"

This is obviously no trip to the mall for Christmas shopping: there are no malls in Detroit, or in Canada either. But something else is missing from Detroit: Canada Geese. None on the local golf course. None on the ball field behind the library. Few at Willow Run Airport, where my father worked before the war. Hardly any in the farm fields outside the city.

That will change dramatically in the years ahead, in Detroit and all over the US. And a major reason is where we have arrived on our Sunday drive into Canada: the [Jack Miner Migratory Bird Sanctuary](#), near Kingsville, Ontario.

Before us, on the ground and in the air, are thousands of Canada Geese. Some are gobbling corn set out for them in the big field. Most are honking. It's so loud the flock sounds like a freight train — almost frightening.

We were not birders. My father owned a pair of binoculars for football games, not waterfowl or warblers. But our family loved to drive to Canada in the fall to see these rare Canada Geese honking *en masse* like a big wild riot — like their team had just won hockey's Stanley Cup. Spectacular! And we loved learning about **Jack Miner**. More about him in a bit.

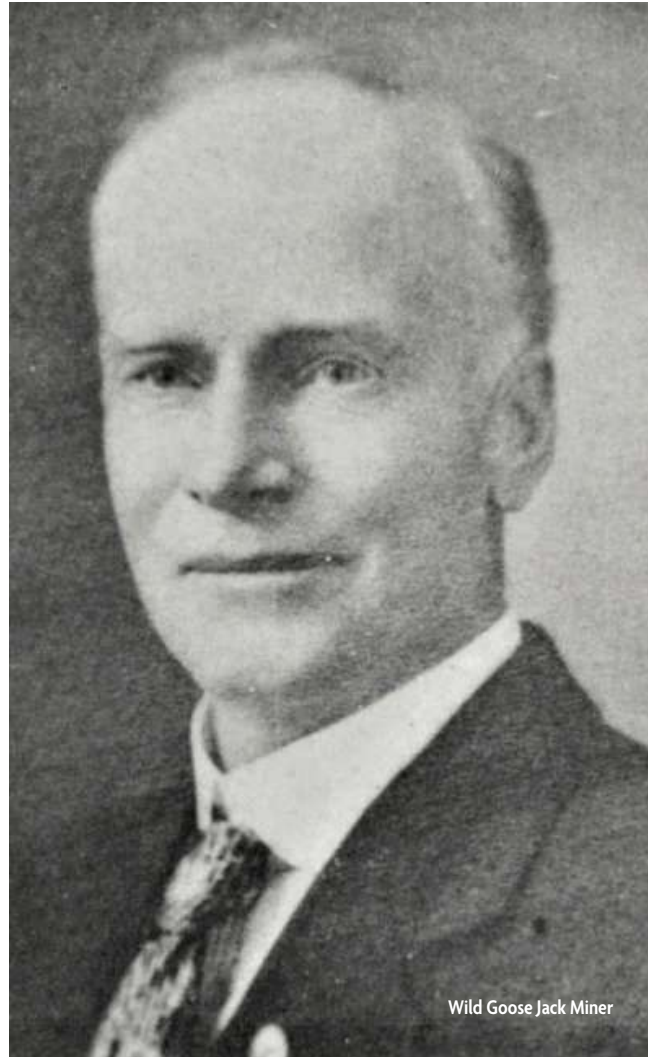
At the start of the 20th century, Canada Geese were in steep decline. Unregulated hunting was the principal reason: No seasons, no tags, no limits. The Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 changed that, established regular hunting seasons. But five decades later, something else had brought the species to the brink in the eastern US: drainage of wetlands vital to the bird's survival.

Continued on page 16

Efforts by conservationists would help to re-establish populations of Canada Geese — and one of those conservationists was “Wild Goose Jack” Miner, an eccentric Ontario trapper who lived from 1865 to 1944. He had no formal schooling and was illiterate until age 33. But as Johnny Appleseed sought to spread apple trees, Miner worked to revive and spread the Canada Goose. It’s no surprise that Jack’s a big deal in Canada, as is the country’s namesake goose. America’s national bird may be fierce and have talons, but our northern neighbor is very fond of its kinder, gentler symbol.

During his lifetime, Miner banded about 40,000 Canada Geese. His efforts led wildlife scientists to greater knowledge about the species’ range and contributed to passing that landmark 1918 bird treaty. He even donated his farm to the cause as that sanctuary for geese that our family visited. He promoted waterfowl sanctuaries as key to conservation.

Now for the eccentric part. Wild Goose Jack was an avidly devout Christian who saw nature as one big zoo, owned and operated by humans. He rejected evolutionary biology and ascribed to a literal interpretation of the Bible. His banding tags bore Christian phrases like “He Cares for You,” and he regarded his tagged geese as “Missionary Messengers.” Admiring their monogamous nature, he tried to protect them by killing crows and owls, immoral creatures to him. He even called for extermination of some non-monogamous wild species. For good measure, he disliked wild predators and killed hundreds of them.



Wild Goose Jack Miner

No wonder we might regard Miner as kind of a nut whose wizardry with geese got way out of hand. But the return of Canada Geese — and their overpopulation where humans live, work and play today — wasn’t all Jack’s doing. The march of human development since his day has removed natural predators and added an abundance of safe ponds and reservoirs near equally abundant food sources (regularly mown lawns and meadows in parks and subdivisions, on golf courses and sports fields). That, as much as anything, has triggered the explosion in goose numbers in our midst. In the mid-20th century, Colorado Parks & Wildlife (CPW) and wildlife agencies in many other states also began to reintroduce geese and take other measures to help them thrive.

We’ve been seeing the results hereabouts ever since, both in permanent local flocks and in more numerous fall-winter migrant visitors (including many Cackling Geese since that species was officially separated from the Canadas in the early 2000s). The tribe of “white-faced” geese has been sharing our greenswards as Front Range human settlement has boomed.

Here’s one anecdotal example that reaches across three quarters of a century: On Jan. 22, 1947, a young birdwatcher named **Hugh Kingery** counted 20 Canada Geese in Denver City Park on his walk to class at Denver’s East High School. Fast forward to a few weeks ago, when the editor of this newsletter followed Kingery’s footsteps through the same park and counted more than 5,000 overwintering Cackling and Canada Geese on Dec. 18, 2022. Pore over and through your database of choice — eBird, CPW records, or perhaps Audubon’s decades of Christmas Bird Counts across dozens of Colorado count circles — and you’ll see similar change.

Continued on page 17

And so, here we are. What is now a common species in American parks causes many to consider it a fat and noisy pest: the goose droppings, the depredation of crops, the honking, even territorial aggression on occasion toward humans and other animals wild and domestic that get too close. And who can forget the chorus of complaints in 2009 after that unfortunate flock of Canada Geese in the path of US Airways Flight 1549 disabled both engines, forcing heroic pilot “Sully” Sullenberger to ditch the airliner into New York’s Hudson River, miraculously saving all on board?

Despite all the negatives, I remain as fond of Canada Geese as I was when I saw and heard those thousands on that boyhood visit to Wild Goose Jack’s sanctuary. In late spring their golden goslings are adorable. And in early December, whenever I approach Arvada’s Lake Arbor, filled with honking geese, I remember Jack Miner. And I think back to my sister, nudging me in the back seat as we approached Miner’s preserve for the geese he loved: “Can you hear it yet?”

Yes, Karen, I could hear it then, and I do today. And I still say: Wow — amazing!

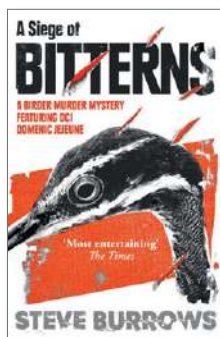
Tom Wilberding of Littleton, a retired home builder, began birding at age 51. He joined DFO after moving to the Denver area in 2004. You can contact him at tom.wilberding@outlook.com.



Cackling Goose trio
Patrick O'Driscoll

BOOK REVIEW

A bird list to die for?



A Siege of Bitterns
A Birder Murder Mystery
Featuring DCI Domenic Jejeune
By Steve Burrows
Point Blank Books
368 pages

Jill Boice

What fun! A murder mystery series for birders labeled, oddly enough, “Birder Murder Mystery.” Whodunit? Why, **Steve Burrows** did. He’s a UK-reared émigré to Canada who has written seven (and counting) avian-themed mysteries, each named with the collective noun for its title species, e.g., *A Siege of Bitterns*. That’s the title of Burrows’ first (published in 2014), which won the Crime Writers of Canada award for Best First Novel.

This book introduces Detective Chief Inspector Domenic Jejeune, a Canadian writer who has just joined the police force in eastern England’s Norfolk County when a controversial environmentalist, Cameron Brae, is found hanged near his beloved marsh. Brae was about to achieve a county list of 400 species. Did a jealous birder kill him to better his own chances for the record? Or did a local developer want him out of the way?

Read on: It’s a well-told mystery. Inspector Jejeune is a birdwatcher himself, and his birding knowledge helps him solve this tangled crime. Burrows weaves lovely descriptions of the joys of birding and the British coastal landscape through the mystery’s plot. Jejeune’s relationships with police Sergeant Maik, older and more experienced, and with Lindy, Domenic’s non-birder girlfriend, add to the story’s depth.

I was introduced to this book by the Birding Book Club of [Environment for the Americas](#), a bird-focused nonprofit that, among other things, coordinates [World Migratory Bird Day](#). The bird club meets about once a month online. I’ve only “attended” twice, but both times the author of that month’s selection spoke to us. Burrows read from the beginning of book five of the Inspector Jejeune series, *A Tiding of Magpies*.

The club’s January selection is **Tim Birkhead**’s new book, *Birds and Us*, and the online meeting is Jan. 26 at 11 a.m. MT. That evening’s meeting will originate from England, which accounts for the morning time here. For more information about the book club, visit <https://www.migratorybirdday.org/bird-book-club>.

What's in a bird's name? If it's "nightjar" or "goatsucker," PLENTY!

Jared Del Rosso

Bird names are more than a collection of words by which we know a species, genus or family. Names carry folklore, belief, and the history of language itself.

I find this easy to observe with nightjars, a favorite bird family of mine that includes poorwills, nighthawks and other twilight fliers. Besides that curious "nightjar" label itself, those species famously have an even stranger alias: Goatsucker. It reveals an ancient, erroneous belief about these gape-mouthed, night-vision wonders — that they suckled domestic goats at night, blinding the goats in the process. This legend and the name itself are more than 2,000 years old. Around 350 BC, **Aristotle** recorded it in his 10-volume *History of Animals*:

The goatsucker . . . flies against the goats and sucks them, whence its name . . . They say that when the udder has been sucked that it gives no more milk, and that the goat becomes blind. This bird is not quick sighted by day, but sees well at night.

Of course, nightjars don't drink the milk of goats, but there may be a bit of fact in this folklore. Nightjars may get close to domestic animals to eat the flying insects that they attract. The scientific name assigned to the nightjar family and closely related bird "allies" commemorates this word origin: *Caprimulgidae* comes from the Latin words for goats and milking.

The history of "nightjar" is less well known, but to me quite poetic and evocative. The "night" part is obvious, for the birds' twilight and nocturnal activity. The second syllable, "jar," packs more meaning. It pertains to the call of the Eurasian Nightjar (*Caprimulgus europaeus*), a mechanical "churr" far less melodious than North America's various "wills" (Whip-poor-will, Chuck-will's-widow, and Common Poorwill). That led to calling it "nightchurr" and "churnowl." Eventually "churr" became "jar," and the *Oxford English Dictionary* tells us that word once meant "a harsh inharmonious sound or combination of sounds." It is also a verb, meaning to unsettle, which adds a shade more meaning to "nightjar."

Perhaps we birders will embrace this double meaning and begin to go "nightjarring" like we go "owling." In the same sense, it would simply mean to seek out nightjars at dusk, like **David Suddjian**'s popular DFO field trips on summer evenings to hear and see Common Poorwills in his Ken Caryl neighborhood. In another way, it might mean allowing ourselves to be "jarred" by these remarkable birds, the way other beings seem to haunt us when our vision is poor and the darkness deep.

The names of North America's nightjars tell their own stories. The "wills" all seem to go by their two- to four-syllable calls. The Cornell Lab of Ornithology's *Birds of the World* entry for the Eastern Whip-poor-will (*Antrostomus vociferus*) states it plainly: "Few North American species say their name as clearly . . ." But all translations of birdsong into human languages must be simplifications, a fact long noted in the English treatment of the Whip-poor-will. One can almost feel **John J. Audubon**'s skepticism about this translation in his [account of the bird's call](#): "A fancied resemblance which its notes have to the syllables whip-poor-will, has given rise to the common name of the bird."

There are many ways to hear this nightjar's song. In other languages, Whip-poor-wills sing other names. One Spanish name for the Whip-poor-will is *Cuerporruin* (or *Cuerpo ruin*, translating to "contemptible body"), which to my ears matches the bird's song well. The same goes for the French-Canadian name, *Bois-pourri*, which translates into "rotten wood," a feature of the Whip-poor-will's habitat in the rich forests of eastern North America.



Continued on page 19

Obviously, there are other ways to translate nightjar songs into language, which leads me to wonder how both the Whip-poor-will and the Chuck-will's-widow (*Antrostomus carolinensis*), a large nightjar of the Southeast, got their names. As seen and read, both are meant as imperative sentences, with “whip” and “chuck” as verbs commanding action.

In the case of Whip-poor-will, the sentence orders: “Administer a whipping to Will,” who is poor for being impoverished, misfortunate, or both. Another folk name for this species changed the object of punishment to women: “Whip-her-well.” Both names recognize the role punitive whipping had in English and, subsequently, earlier American society, in the North and South alike. For “chucks,” as the southeastern birds are sometimes called, the name is more ambiguous, but it’s not hard to imagine a similarly violent meaning. In an 1896 essay on these names, the ethnologist **Albert Samuel Gatschet** claims “chuck” means “choke.”

Such names have implications. I’m researching how whipping figured in folklore surrounding Whip-poor-wills. For now, I’ll note only that social and cultural histories of brutality are hidden in plain sight in these two birds’ names.

Our Common Poorwill, with its [brief, plaintive call](#), recalls the East’s “will.” Perhaps poorwills have fewer and less evocative folk names because they were encountered later by English speakers in the New World. And yet, in *North American Bird Folknames and Names*, **James Kedzie Sayre** finds nearly 40 folk names for our Common Nighthawk. Many suggest confusion about just what sort of creature the nighthawk is, e.g., Booming Swallow and Bull-bat.

Early naturalists also mistook nighthawks for Whip-poor-wills and Chuck-will’s-widows. The “wills” sing their names through dawn and dusk, but generally are inactive during the day. By contrast, nighthawks sometimes fly by day, and their twilight flights make them far more visible. The species were often confused because nighthawks could be seen when wills weren’t singing and wills could be heard when nighthawks weren’t flying.



Ornithologists and birders today know better. Yet we still use an ill-fitting, hand-me-down name for nighthawks, which actually prefer dusk to the night. And, of course, they’re not hawks, though some 18th-century accounts [thought differently](#).

For being unusually shaped, beguilingly voiced birds that we encounter in low light, nightjars and nighthawks have been subject to far more intrigue, misunderstanding, and lore than most birds. What we call them reflects this.

For more on this broad topic, consider **Susan Myers’s** *The Bird Name Book: A History of English Bird Names*, and **Stephen Moss’s** *Mrs. Moreau’s Warbler: How Birds Got Their Names*.

Jared Del Rosso, a birder since 2012, is a sociologist who dabbles in nature writing. He is researching Whip-poor-wills’ place in US culture. He also contributes to the Center for Humans and Nature’s [Stories & Ideas section](#) and blogs about birds at [The Lonesome Whip-poor-will](#).



Top: **Common Nighthawk** (Andy Reago and Chrissy McClarren/Wikipedia)
Bottom: **Common Poorwill** (Connor Long/Wikipedia)

Welcome to new DFO members

Cheryl Ames, Arvada; Carl Bendorf, Longmont; Jeff Cole, Englewood; David and Karen Coupland, Longmont; John Ehrmann and Karen Rutledge, Denver; David and Mariane Erickson, Golden; Marcial Farner, Penrose; Adrienne and Jeff Fustich, Littleton; Joan Grant and Tim Duesing, Colorado Springs; David Hapman and Heidi McWorkman, Boulder; Marlee Hassell and Kathryn Wallisch, Denver; Mary Lawrence, Littleton; George Newman and Theresa Braymer, Arvada; Peggy Pike, Kiowa; Anne Pizzi, Boulder; Denise Rustning, Littleton; Louise Schottstaedt, Castle Pines; Steven Snyder, Arvada; Ryan Stander, Parker; Fred and Jean Starr, Brighton; Diane and Richard Wiest, Denver; and Emil Yappert, Fort Collins

Thank you for your contribution

Research, Education and Conservation Grants Fund

Nate Bond; Paula Boswell and Donna Herrick; Dale Campau; Charles Chase; Linda and C. Raymond Clark; Mary and Dave Driscoll; Lee and Linda Farrell; Mary Geder; Adelia Honeywood; Sandra Hoyle and Steve Methven; Darcy Juday; Roger Koester; Barbara Nabors and Michael Wilson; Janet Peters; Rick and Meg Reck; Jason Sell, Evan Sell and Patricia Kuzma Sell; Robin Sweeney and David Shafer; Lori Sharp; Paul Slingsby; Janine Taurchini; Karen von Saltza; Jan Justice Waddington; Laura and Wayne Wathen; and Scott Yarberry

Friends of DFO

Lisa Backman and Jeff Christoffersen; Sondra Bland and Bob Spencer; Paula Boswell and Donna Herrick; Mary Beverly; Dale Campau; Jim Esten; Joan Grant and Tim Duesing; Martha Eubanks; Mary Geder; Kristine Haglund; Sonja and Grace Hahn; Jan and Doug Hodous; Adelia Honeywood; Sandra Hoyle and Steve Methven; Darcy Juday; Mary Keithler; Rex McGehee; Jim Petri and Christie Owens, *In Memory of Richard Mendez*; Jason Sell, Evan Sell and Patricia Kuzma Sell; Jeffrey Selleck; Robin Sweeney and David Shafer; Sue Summers; Julie Thorpe; Sharon and Jerry Tinianow; Karen von Saltza; Laura and Wayne Wathen; Roni and Larry Wilson; and Mary Zick

DFO's Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch

Kathleen Bahr; Dale Campau; Mary Geder; Angela Grun; Adelia Honeywood; Sandra Hoyle and Steve Methven; Darcy Juday; Roger Koester; Janet Peters; Karen von Saltza; Cheryl Wilcox; and Roni and Larry Wilson





LAST LOOK, LAST WORD

A City Park tale: Meeting Gandalf's "mom"

Patrick O'Driscoll

Dec. 21, 2022: First day of this winter. Bitter sub-zero cold and snow are due by evening, so I drop by Denver City Park for a midday walkabout with the birds. It's 51 and breezy at 1 p.m., but the thermometer's about to plunge 61 degrees in a few hours. Everyone, including the birds, is taking cover.

Descending the steps from half-frozen Ferril Lake, I hear a sing-song call (human, not bird) over by Duck Lake, also half-iced in. She's standing above the south shoreline: Tiny woman in a long puffy coat, Elmer Fudd hat and a bag of bread crusts on her arm. Mallards stream towards her, but she ignores them. Raising both hands around her mouth to amplify, she calls again and again:

"Gannnnn-dallllfff! . . . GANDALF! . . . GANNNN-DALLLFF!"

Continued on page 21



When she pauses, I approach and introduce myself. “Who’s Gandalf?” I ask. She smiles up at me through a Covid mask: “He’s a [Toulouse Goose!](#)” I puzzle a moment, then reply: “You mean, the big brown-and-white goose with the orange beak, legs and feet?”

“Yes! Gandalf,” she says, nodding. So, we both know him. Among City Park park regulars, who doesn’t? Frequently mistaken on eBird for the much smaller [Greater White-fronted Goose](#) by rookie visitors to the park, the huge bird with the giant white butt has been a permanent Duck Lake fixture for years — certainly since before I saw him my first time birding there in 2014.

On eBird (and on checklists of numerous DFO field trips I’ve led in City Park), it is a “Graylag x Swan Goose (hybrid).” It looks a lot like the commercial Toulouses I find later online. Fifteenth-century French breed, farm-raised for goose liver pate. This one? Probably dumped in Duck Lake by some home goose hobbyist after it outgrew the backyard.

Until last spring, there were two of them, virtually identical. They’d been around so long, City Park regulars called them by various nicknames, like [Tweedledum and Tweedledee](#). But I’d never heard “Gandalf” before.

When I ask the woman, her answer makes my jaw drop.

“I incubate him and his brother. I hatch them. They were so cute. But they grow too big for my backyard. So thirteen and a half years ago, I bring them here. **Gandalf** and **Randolph**.”

O. M. G.! Am I hearing the unrecorded origin story? Am I’m talking to . . . the Goose Mother herself?

I ask her name. “They call me ‘Treat Lady,’ ” she says — for that bag of bread on her arm. I stifle the urge to say she shouldn’t feed the geese and ducks, but Treat Lady is already ahead of me.

“The park rangers know me. They say not to feed the ducks. I say, ‘I incubate, I raise this goose.’ I come feed him every night. And see? I give him 100 percent Orowheat whole wheat. Park ranger say, ‘Now **Kim**, you only feed your bird, not the wild ducks, OK?’ ”

She tells me more. Kim is 83, retired, a long-ago Korean immigrant who lives in Aurora but has been coming to Denver City Park for 25 years. She was given four goose eggs by someone who kept a flock out on the eastern Plains. She studied how to incubate them. Two didn’t hatch — but two did! She put a kiddie play pool in the backyard. But as the goslings grew, she knew she couldn’t keep them. She read about their needs: pond, food, companions. She knew a place.

Sometime around 2009, Kim brought Gandalf and Randolph to City Park and set them loose in Duck Lake. She would return to feed them daily, usually in the evening, pushing her 21-year-old Chihuahua, **Leonardo da Vinci**, in a baby stroller. This day, she and Leonardo are early to beat the big cold front.



Continued on page 22

But so far, despite her calling, no Gandalf. “He don’t expect me this time of day,” she says, then raises her voice again: “Come ONNN, GANDY! *Gannnn-DALLFF!*”

Between rounds of calling, she reaches into the stroller for snapshots. Here’s the proud mother, feeding her two geese in the park in summer. And here is Randolph, his Canada Goose mate, and the hybrid gosling they hatched in the park 7 or 8 years ago.

“Somebody stole him,” she says; Randolph disappeared last spring as the park’s overwintering flocks of several thousand Cackling and Canada Geese began to return north. I tell her my theory: I took pictures, probably of Randolph, mating with a Canada Goose *right there* in Duck Lake last March 19. Maybe he followed her north? Or out of the park, anyway?

She’s philosophical: “Gandalf, he’s kind of happy his brother disappeared. Randolph was always picking on him.” Then she laughs: “They were just like Cain and Abel!” Now it dawns on me: No wonder I *never* saw the two of them together. For years, I had to work the angles hard to get a shot of both in the same frame.

It’s been half an hour now. Kim is about to pack up without seeing, let alone feeding Gandalf. As if on cue, the huge goose suddenly flies out low from behind the island in Duck Lake with a few Canadas. They splash into an opening in the ice, out in the northwest corner. Kim calls again: “*GANNNN-DALLL!* Gandy!”

This time, he hears, and understands. Head high, neck extended, Gandalf swims, then waddles across some ice. He *gronks* his low, loud, not-Canada-Goose honk and swims some more, walks some more, straight at Kim, who’s still calling. “He’s probably thinking, ‘Why’s she calling me now? It’s the afternoon. I probably don’t know her,’” she says, getting down gingerly past the lake’s retaining wall to the rocky shore.

Dozens of Mallards swarm on the ice as Gandalf arrives within an arm’s length. “Hi, Gandy!” she says, reaching out with bread crusts. The goose long-necks over the ducks to gobble mouthfuls of early supper. The Mallards scrum for dropped handoffs and bits. The frozen shoreline is alive.

In 10 minutes, it’s over. Gandalf withdraws into the water, a bit of bread still in the corner of his giant bill. The ducks disperse. Kim picks her way back up to the stroller and the dog. They trundle back to the car.

Soon, the Goose Mother of Duck Lake is homeward bound until next time. All she really needs now is a good bumper sticker:
Honk if you love Gandalf!



Page 20, counterclockwise:
Gandalf on ice
Food for Gandalf
Kim calling for Gandalf at Duck Lake in Denver City Park

Page 21, top to bottom:
So long until next time
Kim and her Chihuahua at Duck Lake, waiting for Gandalf

Page 22, top to bottom:
Old snapshot of Randolph with Canada mate and hybrid offspring
Gandalf and his hungry entourage

Page 23:
Gandalf after feeding

Photos by Patrick O'Driscoll



Until the next Lark Bunting . . .

GOOD WINTER BIRDING!



THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 59 | ISSUE 04 | APRIL 2023

DFOBIRDS.ORG

BIRDING

Bohemian *WAX*-sody:
Waxwings everywhere!

PAGES 2, 12, 26

CHICO BASIN RANCH

Bye-bye? Access
to be scant in 2025

PAGE 16

FROM THE FIELD

March Madness?
No, February Funness!

PAGE 19

DFO NEWS NOTES

Bird Bombs! Xmas count
results! Hawk Watch!

PAGE 6

dfo
DENVER FIELD
ORNITHOLOGISTS



Bohemian Waxwings

Jim Esten
High Line Canal
Arapahoe County



A DFO member since 2014, **Jim Esten** is photo editor of

The Lark Bunting. He took photos on and off for 35 years before getting his first digital camera in 2001. He first focused on birds a decade ago while visiting Florida. He is retired from network IT service.

ON THE COVER

Bohemian Waxwing: Irruption's darlings are on everyone's winter 2023 checklist

What a season for unexpected bird species in the Denver area. In addition to the usual scattered reports of seldom-seens like Winter Wren (the cover bird in our previous newsletter), there was the sudden spate beginning in November of Cassin's Finches, higher-country birds not often spotted down here on the edge of the Great Plains.

But for sheer numbers and the widespread array of sightings, no one can recall a winter like this one for Bohemian Waxing (*Bombycilla garrulus*), that plump yet sleek, starling-sized, swarming fruit lover from points well north of Colorado. If you've seen one, you have not begun to see them all. Since mid-December, flocks from handfuls to a thousand or more have vagabonded up and down the Front Range, from Larimer and Weld counties to Pueblo. They're here for the winter food, feasting on crabapples, juniper berries and the black fruit of the Common Buckthorn, a shrubby invasive.

All this is just what Bohemian Waxwings do in winter: Move in unpredictable migration patterns (depending on where the fruit supply is or is not), often in huge numbers. In years like this, they may venture well south of Wyoming, their southern limit in "normal" times. Come spring, they return to a boreal subarctic swath around the globe to breed.

This month's cover birds were captured on Jan. 15 by **Jim Esten**, photo editor of *The Lark Bunting*, where the irruption was most visible early on: neighborhoods along the High Line Canal where southeast Denver and north Arapahoe County meet. Since then, they have ranged widely across metro Denver, adding a "lifer" to many local birders' checklists.

DFO member **Jared Del Rosso**, who contributes bird essays to this newsletter, delved into the species' surprising history in Denver in a recent post on the CoBirds list-serv. He quoted pioneer Denver birder **W.H. Bergtold**, who wrote more than a century ago that Bohemian Waxwings were "all over [Denver] in great numbers" in 1917. Del Rosso says Bergtold also had noted only a single sighting of a Cedar Waxwing since 1905. Jared also wrote a thoughtful post about this Colorado irruption on his blog, [The Lonesome Whip-poor-will](#). If you're hungry for more on Bohemians, it's a must read.

Another DFO member, **Gregg Goodrich**, crunched some eBird numbers to find 750 checklist reports from mid-December through January of irruption Bohemians in Denver and four adjacent counties around it. (*Read about how Gregg counted a flock of more than 800 Bohemians in the "Last Look, Last Word" feature at the end of this month's newsletter.*)

Before we go, fun waxwing facts:

- Bohemians' bright, sealing-wax red tips, yellow and white streaks in wings, and yellow bands on tails get larger and more prominent with age
- Cornell's *Birds of the World* notes the species' susceptibility to collisions with windows and cars, in both cases because fruiting trees and shrubs are often planted near buildings and roads
- Called "Bohemian" for its far-flung wanderings, the species' scientific name blends Latin words to describe the bird: *Bombycilla* combines *bombyx* ("silk") and *cilla* ("tail") for the waxwing's silky-soft plumage, and *garrulus* ("chatter") echoes in the English *garrulous* ("extremely talkative") for the flocks' incessant, high-pitched trills

— **Patrick O'Driscoll**



IN THIS ISSUE

- 2 On the Cover**
Bohemian Waxwing:
Irruption's darlings are on
everyone's winter 2023 checklist
- 5 From the President**
After winter's hard knocks,
here comes the equinox!
- 6 DFO News Notes**
- 10 Program Previews**
- 12 Birding**
Bohemian WAX-sody!
Since before Christmas, Colorado
has had a wondrous waxwingding
- 14 Conservation**
At disputed ex-golf course, a call
to conserve urban bird habitat for
Denver
- 16 Birding / Conservation**
Will 10 weeks a year be as good as
future birding gets at Chico Basin
Ranch?
- 19 From the Field with David Suddjian**
March Madness?
How 'bout February Funnness?
- 23 January Program Review**
Why cranes? Rich Beilfuss has a
crane-ucopia of answers to share
- 26 Last Look, Last Word**
In skies filled with Bohemian
Waxwings, how to count the
biggest swarms?

The Lark Bunting newsletter of Denver Field Ornithologists is published online monthly at dfobirds.org except for joint issues in July–August and February–March.

PUBLICATION STAFF

Editor

Patrick O'Driscoll

Assistant Editor

Mike Fernandez

Photo Editor

Jim Esten

Layout and Design

Jennie Dillon

Contributors this issue

Susan Blansett, Jill Boice, Joe Chen, Anne Craig, Ken Fail, Mike Fernandez, Mary Geder, Gregg Goodrich, Norm Lewis, Rob Raker, David Suddjian, Gary Witt

CONTRIBUTE TO THE NEWSLETTER

Submit original articles or story ideas to the editor at patodrisk@gmail.com.
Send image-file photos of birds or bird outings to the photo editor at jcesten@gmail.com.

Editors reserve the right to accept and edit suitable articles and photos for publication.

NEWSLETTER ADVERTISING

The Lark Bunting does not accept or contain paid advertising. DFO **AdBIRDtisements** are FREE to club members to seek or sell bird-related equipment, supplies, books and decorative items (artwork, photos, clothing, note cards, etc.).

- Ads must include name, email and/or telephone number, and may include weblink if items offered online
- Ads may be edited for inappropriate content or excessive length (125-word limit); ONE photo or image per ad
- Ads do not carry over each month. To renew, resubmit by next deadline
- Available *only* to DFO members
- Deadline: last day of month except January and June (*The Lark Bunting* does not publish in February and July)

Send AdBIRDtisement materials to editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com.

Next deadline: Friday, March 31



© 2023 Denver Field Ornithologists. All rights reserved



A community of birders, learning and acting together for avian wildlife

Denver Field Ornithologists is an all-volunteer organization that conducts hundreds of free birdwatching field trips throughout the year and welcomes participation and membership by all. DFO promotes enjoyment of nature, the study of birds, and protection of them and their habitats in greater Denver and beyond.

In addition to field trips, evening programs and birding workshops, DFO conducts community science in the field, including the spring Hawk Watch raptor migration count on Dinosaur Ridge.

DFO awards grants annually for bird-related research, education and conservation projects in Colorado. For more information, visit the [Research, Education & Conservation Grants](#) page on the DFO website.

DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and financial contributions to DFO's three giving funds are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

DFO OFFICERS

President

Susan Blansett
susan.blansett@gmail.com

Vice President

Sharon Tinianow
sharontinianow@gmail.com

Secretary (interim)

Nathan Bond
dfobirds.secretary@gmail.com

Treasurer

Kathy Holland
kcloudview@comcast.net

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Mary Cay Burger
mcburger3@juno.com

Karen Drozda
drozforte@aol.com

Mary Geder
mfg5000@live.com

Tina Jones
tjcalliope@hotmail.com

Roger Koester
koester1949@gmail.com

Patrick O'Driscoll
patodrisk@gmail.com

Steve Ryder
cedarmesa@yahoo.com

David Suddjian
dsuddjian@gmail.com

Bill Turner
toursbyturner@aol.com

Elaine Wagner
eWagner1000@yahoo.com

COMMITTEE CHAIRS AND ROLES

Better Birding Skills

Sharon Tinianow (acting)
sharontinianow@gmail.com

Communications & Outreach

Sharon Tinianow
sharontinianow@gmail.com

Conservation

Steve Ryder
cedarmesa@yahoo.com

Field Trips

David Suddjian
davidsuddjian@gmail.com

Finance

Roger Koester
koester1949@gmail.com

Grants

Elaine Wagner
eWagner1000@yahoo.com

Hawk Watch

David Hill
davidhill2357@gmail.com

Membership

Cyndy Johnson (interim)
cyndyjohnson28@gmail.com

Nominations

Mary Geder
mfg5000@live.com

Programs Director

Bill Turner
toursbyturner@aol.com

Historian

Kristine Haglund
kahaglund1@aol.com

Web Administrator

Jim Esten
admin@dfobirds.org

Zoom Coordinator

Peter Stoltz
dfobirds.zoom@gmail.com

DFO ONLINE

Website

dfobirds.org

Facebook Group

facebook.com/groups/dfobirds

Instagram

instagram.com/denverfieldornithologists

CONTACT

Email

dfocommsgroup@gmail.com

Via website

dfobirds.org

[Located at the bottom of the homepage](#)

US Mail

Attn: Kathy Holland
Treasurer, DFO
351 E Caley Ave
Centennial, CO 80121-2201

LEARN MORE

Membership — Join or Renew

dfobirds.org/DFO/Membership

Field Trips — Explore / Sign Up

dfobirds.org/FieldTrips.aspx

Volunteering

dfobirds.org/DFO/Volunteer.aspx

Charitable Giving

dfobirds.org/DFO/Donations.aspx

DFO Merch Store

zazzle.com/store/official_dfo_shop



FROM THE PRESIDENT

After winter's hard knocks, here comes the equinox!

By the time this issue of *The Lark Bunting* is available for reading, we'll be barely two weeks from Spring Equinox, *aka* the first day of spring. As its blend of the Latin words *aequus* and *nox* implies, *equinox* means "equal night" — a day with 12 hours of daylight and 12 of night. Twice a year, equinoxes mark the sun crossing the Equator, northbound in spring, southbound in fall.

It's a wonderful word for wonderful times, isn't it? And for most of us birders, our most anticipated times for birding. Can you feel it? *Spring migration!* Fall migration! Birds coming north, birds going south. To nesting grounds now, and back to wintering grounds later. And here below, we get to watch the seasonal parade.

I admit, however, that I'm *really* partial to *this* equinox. Aren't you? Where we live, we've made it past the slow U-turn in winter's cold and darkness. With spring's approach, we dream of three warming months ahead, daylight lengthening daily. More time for birds! And look! Here they'll come in breeding plumage . . . and oh, the birdsong! It all triggers our human chorus (with binoculars attached): "Oooh! . . . Omigosh! . . . Amazing! . . . Did you see that?" I get tingly just thinking about it. To go birding in shirtsleeves again! To slather the sunscreen once more! To . . .

WHAM! Fierce winds whip hard outside my window this late February evening, slapping me out of my reverie as I write. Out the back door, a 4-foot hogback of snow fills one-quarter of the patio. It was the only place left to put what I shoveled after back-to-back storms, with too little sun and warmth in between to melt them off.

After our hard winter, here now is March. But cruelly, spring's first month is also Colorado's snowiest. I can't begrudge, though, whatever more snow awaits us — not after 22 years of the worst drought in Colorado and the Southwest in 1,200 years ([a new scientific study tells us](#)). Meanwhile, avian flu has us counting dead birds for the first time since West Nile ravaged Colorado corvid populations two decades ago.

Still, there have been reasons to smile and rejoice this winter-into-spring. We've had two surprise irruptions of uncommon avian visitors along the Front Range: Thrilling flocks of Bohemian Waxwings and unexpectedly common sightings of Cassin's Finches. Thanks to birds' unpredictable travels (and to the sharp-eyed among us who spot the "vagrants"), Colorado has had a fairly regular roster this winter of rare sightings.

The coming weeks of early spring also mean checking for uncommon shorebirds, elegant cranes and early migrants of so many species, rather like kids hunting for Easter eggs. One of my favorite spring events is already underway since March 1: DFO's Hawk Watch observation of the annual raptor migration that flows, soars and dips northward along Dinosaur Ridge in Jefferson County. And really now: Who doesn't love hawks, eagles and other birds of prey? This annual effort is a great way not just to see these magnificent birds, but to learn, in the company of expert hawk counters, how to spot and recognize them, even at a distance. Spend a few days up on the ridge with chief watcher **Emma Riley** and her band of regulars, and you'll improve your raptor skills immeasurably. (*For details how, see our Hawk Watch update in DFO News Notes, on the following page.*)

For now, I'll be carefully poking around my garden, especially in the two or three places where snow crocuses usually emerge. In those slender green leaves and yellow petals will be confirmation of our sweetest hope that spring really is here.

Good, warm and wonderful spring birding to you all!

— **Susan Blansett**



Snow crocus, emerging
©Annaigonina908 / Dreamstime

DFO News Notes

Got blurbs on birds? Share with **DFO News Notes**: Colorado birding newsbits, eBird milestones, tales from the trail, birding life (and life birds!), etc. Send items, photos and any questions to newsletter editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com.

CYNDY JOHNSON IS NEW DFO MEMBERSHIP CHAIR

By unanimous online vote in January, the DFO Board appointed longtime DFO member **Cyndy Johnson** as Membership chair and as an interim member of the board. A Morrison area resident, Johnson will serve on the board provisionally until the club's April election of officers and board members and election to a three-year term.

Johnson, who retired in 2020 after nearly 40 years in information technology, now goes birding "every chance I get." She is a 15-year volunteer veteran of waterfowl counts and Breeding Bird Atlas surveys at South Platte Park. She also previously volunteered for years with Hawk Watch on Dinosaur Ridge (now managed by DFO) "until my back and knees wouldn't make it up that hill anymore!" She took up birding about 35 years ago while also taking up scuba diving. On Diving trips in the Caribbean, West Indies, Central America and the Pacific, she has birded a variety of islands and tropical jungle habitat. Of late, she has added more birding tours of South and Central America.

Welcome to the DFO volunteer team, Cyndy, and thanks for your willingness to help manage our growing club.



Cyndy Johnson

BIRD BOMBS AWAY! "COLORADO BLUES," "SPRING SWALLOWS"

The next free DFO bird ID seminar, "**Colorado Blues**," focuses on Colorado's bluebird species (we have all three) just as bluebird migration begins. This short (30-40 minutes) Zoom session is set for **Thursday, March 7 at 7 p.m. MST**. [Click here to register](#). About a month later, fire up Zoom on **Thursday, April 13 at 7 p.m. MDT** for another new BIRD BOMBS session, "**Spring Swallows**," about the swallow species that nest here in Colorado. [Click here to register](#). And If you missed our most recent BIRD BOMBS blast on bird topography, "**Where's That on the Bird?**," [click here to view the archived video](#) on DFO's Past Programs web page.



DFO'S HAWK WATCH SPRING COUNTING HAS BEGUN

On March 1, the DFO-led Hawk Watch at Dinosaur Ridge began counting migrating birds of prey along the foothills hogback location in Jefferson County. Led by lead counter **Emma Riley** (returning after last year's successful season), the ridgetop tally by a cadre of volunteers will run seven days a week through May 14. This annual movement of hawks, eagles, falcons and other raptors bound for nesting sites to the north is one of nature's most amazing and mysterious spectacles. Drop-ins are always welcome, and volunteers of all experience levels can participate.

This season and the next few years of raptor migration monitoring are of heightened importance because of the continuing epidemic of avian influenza in the West. It has been documented to spread to populations of raptors known to feed on carrion. Carcasses of stricken birds in the wild — mostly geese and other waterfowl that died on lakes and reservoirs still frozen over — have been easy pickings, especially for eagles.

Continued on page 7

The Hawk Watch team thanks DFO's partners — Colorado Field Ornithologists, Jefferson County Open Space, Denver Audubon and Nature's Educators — for successful efforts in recruiting volunteers. Anyone interested in joining the Hawk Watch effort can [click here to read more](#) about this community science program and contact DFO's coordinator for volunteers via our website.

PIKES PEAK BIRDING & NATURE FEST COMING IN MAY

Peak week for spring migration along the central Front Range is also the time for this year's Pikes Peak Birding & Nature Festival in and around Colorado Springs, from **Thursday, May 18 through Sunday, May 21**. From the Plains shortgrass prairie to riparian forests, foothills and deep canyons, activities will include expanded "bonus birding" Thursday, three "Big Sit" birding events, a new class on mountain lions, a bug "walkabout," hummingbird banding, behind-the-scenes visits to working Plains ranches (including one with a trove of post-dinosaur and early mammal fossils), raptor ID, eBird how-tos, a Saturday night "Birds, Brews & Bites" mixer with music. Plus, the festival's usual wide array of other field trips, programs, speakers, virtual learning and other events with and about birds, insects, other wildlife, and native plants, wildflowers and other flora. Early bird registration (\$35) opens **Saturday, March 25**, 10 a.m. MT. Check the festival website then but not before for more details. <https://pikespeakbirdingandnaturefestival.org>



Joe Chen

STATEWIDE RESULTS IN FOR 2022 CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Hundreds of birders tallied more than 670,000 birds of just over 200 species during the 2022-23 holidays for this winter's Colorado Christmas Bird Count. Final results in the annual effort were released March 1 by **Brandon Percival** of Pueblo West, the Colorado CBC regional editor. Results came in from 51 areas across the state, each confined to a 15-mile diameter circle in or near familiar city, town and rural locations. In a report posted to the CoBirds list-serv, Percival listed statewide totals of 201 species and 672,406 birds counted within the Dec. 14-Jan. 5 Christmas count window.

The top three count circles for total birds tallied more than 40,000 each: John Martin Reservoir (Bent County), 75,323 birds, Fort Collins (Larimer), 57,579 and Crook (Logan), 43,396. The next 10 circles reported at least 20,000 birds each: Longmont (36,215), Barr Lake (33,996), Boulder (33,905), Denver Urban (30,049), Grand Junction (28,437), Pueblo (26,225), Denver (26,214), North Jeffco (21,226), Pueblo Reservoir (20,574), and Weldona-Fort Morgan (20,456).

Top three locations for most species were Pueblo Reservoir with 131, Denver (119) and Boulder (113). Seven other count circles tallied at least 100 species: John Martin Reservoir (112), Penrose (107), Grand Junction and Monte Vista NWR (both 104), North Jeffco (103), Fort Collins (102) and Colorado Springs (100). [Click here for Percival's table](#) of all the Colorado count circle results.

2020 DFO PRESENTER DREW LANHAM ON NATURE'S INSPIRATION

One of DFO's most popular evening programs in the Zoom era was Clemson University wildlife ecologist, birder and [The Home Place](#) author **J. Drew Lanham's** November 2020 presentation, "[Coloring the Conservation Conversation](#)," which drew 350 viewer/listeners online and numerous others to the archived video on the DFO website. In a career of numerous honors, a new highlight came last year when Lanham was awarded a [2022 MacArthur Fellowship](#), also known as the "genius grant." Last month, public television's national *PBS News Hour* featured Lanham in an extended interview and feature in light of his MacArthur award. [Click here to watch the video](#) of Lanham's appearance as aired Feb. 8 on PBS, or [click here to read a written transcript](#) of it.

Continued on page 8

DFO BOARD APPROVES BIRD RESEARCH GRANTS FOR 2023

Five avian research projects will receive a combined \$9,100 in grants in 2023 from DFO's Research, Conservation & Education Grant Fund. On recommendation from the club's Grants Committee, the DFO Board approved the slate of recipients at its quarterly meeting Feb. 26. As in 2022, this year's financial aid amounts to the largest single-year total since the grant fund was created in 1994. Notification of successful awardees was expected after the deadline for this issue of *The Lark Bunting*. Look for an article in an upcoming newsletter identifying the five recipients and their research topics, institutional affiliations, and funding amounts.

COLORADO'S "SOOTY SPARROW" CATCHES ABC'S EYE

Each week, the [American Bird Conservancy](#) spotlights a "Bird of the Week" species to friends and supporters on its email list. The last week of February, Colorado's state bird (and the namesake of DFO's newsletter) filled ABC's spotlight: the Lark Bunting, aka "Troubadour of the Plains." Among the facts and figures in the conservancy's online tribute (population: 10 million but "decreasing") is a note that the species' name "is a serious misnomer: After all, this bird is neither a lark nor a bunting. So what is it then?" [Click here to read ABC's article](#) and find out. But here's a hint: The headline on that particular paragraph reads "Sooty Sparrow."



Lark Bunting female
Patrick O'Driscoll

DFO NEWS

Annual DFO election coming in April

Mary Geder

The Nominating Committee of Denver Field Ornithologists has recruited several candidates for the next election of club officers and board members, conducted annually in April.

As in previous years since the Covid pandemic, this year's voting will be via email. DFO members in good standing are welcome to nominate additional candidates, including themselves. (To nominate or ask questions, contact Nominations chair **Mary Geder** at mfg5000@live.com. Members without an email address on file can contact Geder by phone at 303-981-8823.) The deadline for nominations is **March 21, 2023**.

Declared candidates so far include three of the current DFO officers seeking standard, renewable one-year terms for office. By customary club practice, the current DFO president, **Susan Blansett**, is completing her service after two years and will become immediate past president. Also by customary practice, the current vice president, **Sharon Tinianow**, will run to succeed Blansett as president. Thus, the position of DFO vice president will be open. As of this writing, no one has applied or been nominated for that vacancy.

Kathy Holland, the current DFO treasurer, also will run for re-election. **Nate Bond**, who was appointed earlier this year as interim secretary to replace **Peter Stoltz**, will stand for his first election to that office.

DFO membership will also elect several members of the DFO Board of Directors for three-year terms. On the ballot are three current members who have agreed to seek re-election: **David Hill** (who is finishing his past presidency), **Roger Koester** and **Bill Turner**. A fourth candidate for the board is **Cyndy Johnson**, who was appointed as interim Membership chair and an interim board member in late 2022.

The Lark Bunting will publish election details, voting instructions, and information about the candidates in the next issue of the newsletter, due in early April.

Longtime DFO member **Mary Geder** is chair of the Nominating Committee.

Communicator? Outreach? DFO needs YOU!

Sharon Tinianow

The committee responsible for Denver Field Ornithologists' website, social media presence, newsletter, and other club messaging for DFO programs and events is seeking new members with an interest in communications to help with a variety of tasks. Come join us!

The DFO Communications & Outreach Committee meets four times a year. In between, committee members work individually and in small teams to help inform and update DFO members and the public about what our club is doing.

If you enjoy writing, social media and communications in general, this is the perfect place in DFO to contribute much-needed volunteer help for the club. We'll provide any training for specific C&O tasks, but we'd also love to know about your own "comms" strengths, interests and ideas to make our volunteer efforts even more effective.

Check out these brief descriptions of volunteer roles and tasks:

- **Publicity Coordinator** (2 hours/month): Updates the DFO website with information about monthly programs; posts about upcoming programs to DFO's Facebook Group, Instagram feed, and the COBirds birding group/list-serv on Google; writes text for direct email "blasts" about programs to DFO's mailing lists. For more details and to volunteer, contact **Sharon Tinianow** at sharontinianow@gmail.com
- **Monthly Program Reviewer** (8 times/year): Attends DFO monthly programs via Zoom and writes a short (up to 500 words) summary/review of the presentation for publication in *The Lark Bunting* newsletter. Contact editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com
- **Instagram Administrator** (2 hours/month): Posts stories, video reels, and images to the DFO Instagram feed weekly and follows other related organizations, all to build and maintain DFO's Instagram presence. Contact Tinianow at sharontinianow@gmail.com

If you've got other ideas or interests in more effectively communicating with our membership and the public, we'd love to hear them. Contact Sharon (or Pat for the newsletter) at their emails above. And thank you!

Sharon Tinianow, who joined DFO in 2016, began birding in an ornithology class in college. Now DFO vice president and previously editor of *The Lark Bunting*, she retired as assistant director of CU Boulder's Museum of Natural History.

FOR SALE



BIRDING VEST WOMEN'S / SMALL

Women's "Basic Options" birding/gardening/fishing vest, khaki, size SMALL. **\$35.** NEW, never worn. Eight exterior pockets and four interior pockets. 19 inches across; zipper length is 21.5 inches (zipper reaches to below collar).

Contact:
Kathy Holland,
kcloudview@comcast.net

.....
DFO AdBIRDtisements!
To place your own free bird-related ad (DFO members only) see details on page 3



Alyssa Davidge
Claire Harris

How Historical Redlining Led Denver's Cooper's Hawks to Live Where They Do

Alyssa Davidge
Monday, March 27
7 p.m. MDT via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

Once known as a feared and artful raptor mainly in the deciduous and mixed forests of rural and wildlands America, the Cooper's Hawk has pioneered outward to become a regular resident of urban and suburban landscapes since the 1970s. Cornell's *Birds of the World* calls it "likely the most common backyard breeding raptor across North America."

The species' remarkably successful adaptation to urban environments like Denver's is predicated chiefly on forest conditions in the neighborhoods where we find (and enjoy seeing) it. Designed by nature to maneuver swiftly through robust woodlands in pursuit of its prey, Cooper's is most comfortable where the trees are mature and numerous.

Alyssa Davidge, the Denver raptor biologist who will present March's provocatively titled program, finds it no coincidence that those places are neighborhoods intentionally favored by the historically segregationist "redlining" housing policies that date to the 1930s. One of those practices was "redlining," which made mortgage loans unavailable or unaffordable to people of color in the predominantly minority neighborhoods where they were largely confined by segregation.

How does racism affect wildlife? Davidge says she will explore "how Cooper's Hawks use Denver" and how land management of the city because of redlining policies "may play a role in (the birds') decisions." She will examine current Cooper's Hawk occupancy in redlined neighborhoods and other land attributes across the city "to explore the effect of historical policies on today's urban raptors." Her presentation is subtitled, "Impacts of Historic Redlining Policy on Wildlife Habitat and Cooper's Hawk Occupancy."

Davidge is a second-year master's student in the University of Colorado Denver's Integrative Biology Department. Before returning to graduate school, she was a condor biologist with the Peregrine Fund, managing the California Condor population on the North Rim of the Grand Canyon. She also worked several seasons banding terns and plovers for the San Diego Zoo's Conservation Research Institute, conserving spotted owl populations in the Sierra Nevada, and monitoring migratory birds for HawkWatch International and Cape May Raptor Banding Project in Washington, New Mexico, and New Jersey. Her current focus is on smarter policy decisions for the future of conservation and biodiversity. She hopes to become a wildlife biologist, with a raptor focus, for Colorado Parks & Wildlife, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, or the U.S. Geological Survey.

[Click here to register](#) for this free March 27 webinar. You'll receive a link and subsequent reminders to connect to Davidge's program as the date nears.



Alyssa Davidge and Cooper's Hawk (Brian Millsap)



SPRING PROGRAM PREVIEW

Birdsong and Habitats: Updates from DFO-funded Avian Research

Leah Crenshaw, Olivia Taylor
Monday, April 24
7 p.m. MST via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

The final installment in the winter-spring series of DFO monthly Zoom webinar programs (co-sponsored by Denver Public Library) will be a kind of show-and-tell session with recipients of grants in 2022 from the Denver Field Ornithologists' [Research, Education and Conservation Fund](#).

At least two of the six recipients of grants in 2022 will present updates on their research at this program. All grant winners agree to report back to the DFO membership in one of three ways: An article in *The Lark Bunting* newsletter, a DFO field trip planned around the theme and field location of the research, or an oral presentation at the April membership meeting, usually an evening gathering via webinar.

In this case, two of those who will present on April 24 are studying and analyzing birdsong in Colorado, but in different birds in very different habitats: Western Meadowlarks in the Pawnee National Grasslands, and Black-capped Chickadees in canyons above Boulder.

The grasslands researcher is **Leah Crenshaw**, a master's thesis student in the School of Biological Sciences at the University of Northern Colorado in Greeley. She is analyzing grassland birdsong to determine the effect human landscape development has on birds' breeding success. Other previous studies have shown the effect on avian abundance and diversity. But in her [grant application narrative](#), Crenshaw said "a notable research gap exists" in determining what effect landscape changes may have on birds' individual behaviors and fitness. Her research is against a backdrop of three-quarters of North American grassland bird species in decline.

Her DFO-funded work seeks to provide new insights into what forces underpin population changes in grassland birds so as to improve conservation of those in Colorado. Crenshaw also aims to offer land managers "data useful to promoting diversity and abundance on their properties."

The other birdsong research presenter is **Olivia Taylor**, a student in the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at the University of Colorado, Boulder. Her focus is on measuring the effects of geographic isolation on differences in song between populations of Black-capped Chickadees as a way to understand further how isolation influences birdsong evolution.

In her [grant application narrative](#), Taylor noted the critical importance of birdsong for recognition within species, defense of territories and mating. "Much like human language, bird song is learned at a young age through exposure to parents or other neighboring adults," she wrote. She aims to explore the effects of canyons as "isolating mechanisms that drive song evolution." Her hypothesis: With lack of exposure to outside individual birds and less "cultural flow," the songs of populations isolated by canyons "will diverge," and divergence will increase with distance between those populations.

[Click here to register](#) for this free April 24 webinar. You'll receive a link and subsequent reminders to connect to the grant recipients' program as the date nears.

BIRDING

Bohemian *WAX*-sody! Since before Christmas, Colorado has had a wondrous waxwingding

David Suddjian

Two days before Christmas, I was out on my Ken Caryl driveway, and the sun had already dropped behind the nearby foothills. It was late enough on this short winter day — 4:15 p.m. Dec. 23, two days past the solstice — that my yard birds had departed for the night. Only Mountain Chickadees were still making last dashes to the feeders.

Looking west, I spotted a flock of about 25 birds coming my way fast. Small but not too small, they reminded me, in that first moment of discovery, of a tight flock of starlings. But in that same split-second, my brain was already doubting: “Too late in the day for a flock of anything. I don’t get starlings anyway. These aren’t that color.”

As the birds came near and began to turn south, I saw long, pointed, triangular wings — something like starlings. But this flock was more tightly arrayed, and the birds were pale gray, not dark. Stout as starlings? Sure, but they seemed a tad small. Then they banked, and I heard trilled whistles, down-slurred, like a finger flicking along the teeth of a plastic comb.

All of three seconds since first glimpse, the encounter clicked: Of course, *Bohemian Waxwings*! A couple of weeks earlier, a few had begun to turn up in Colorado, but I hadn’t expected that a flock would swoop over my driveway!

By early January, a full-scale irruption of rare Bohemians had arrived along the Front Range and some other parts of Colorado, along with good numbers of expected Cedar Waxwings. But to me, “irruption” sounds negative, and “invasion” even worse. I’m calling this happy event a fiesta. These flocks have brought high times for so many Colorado birders. We’re all reveling in the spectacle.

The waxwing flocks have appeared in many places along the edge of the mountains, swarming around widely and, sometimes, sticking a little longer in one spot or another. At the irruption’s peak, there were so many reports on eBird that nobody could really track how many had descended on the state. But clearly, it had to be many thousands.

DFO field trips didn’t miss this opportunity, first with a successful “chase” trip for Bohemians, led by **Gary Witt** on Jan. 7. We found them on seven more DFO outings in January and February, and they could still be with us into April.

As many of you can now attest, the waxwing flocks are spectacles to see and hear. They gather in dense ranks in the



Bohemian and Cedar
waxwings, side by side
Norm Lewis

Continued on page 13



DFO birders on waxwings
in Wheat Ridge Greenbelt
Anne Craig



Bohemians feasting
on juniper berries
Ken Fail

BOHEMIAN WAXODY *cont from page 12*

crowns of deciduous trees, many flocks totaling 200 birds or more (and a few even counted at or near 1,000). Hungry and trilling, they drop down, seemingly in shifts, to feast in trees and shrubs laden with winter fruit — crabapples, junipers, buckthorns and other berry producers.

Then, often for no reason we humans can detect, the whole flock suddenly spooks and is gone in seconds. True to their “Bohemian” name, this winter’s visitors have wandered widely around town and along the Front Range, roaming from one feeding area to another in clouds of free-spirited waxwing magic.

All this is a rarity because the Bohemian Waxwing is a more northerly species than the Cedar. Most years, just a few, if any, make it south to Colorado. But every so often, something transforms the few into wave after wave, an infrequent spectacle.

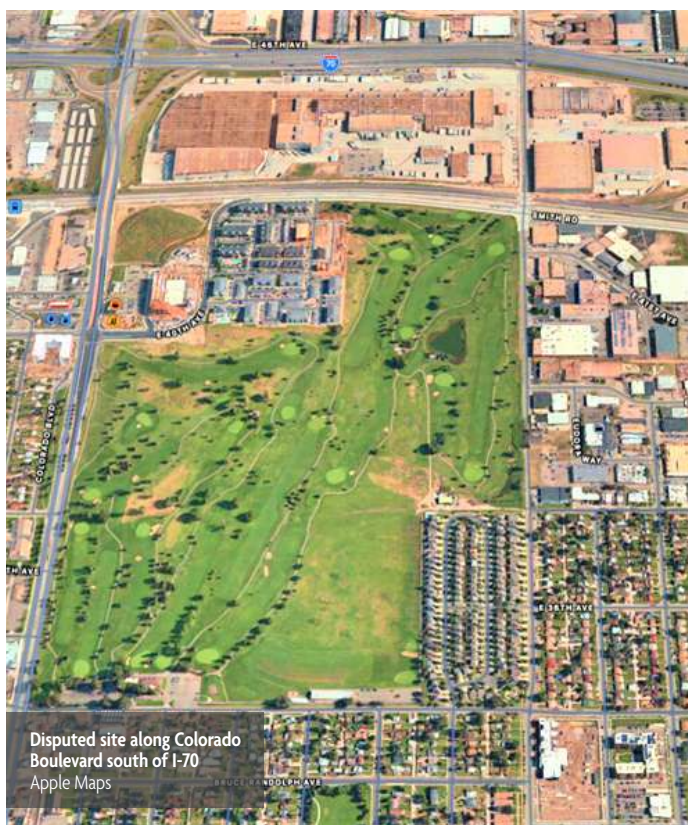
This scale is not unprecedented; similarly large incursions have come before, though Colorado’s last one was 15 years ago. This season’s Bohemian numbers must reflect a lack of food farther north, which could also explain our larger flocks of Cedars and American Robins, too. Arctic and subarctic breeders around the globe, Bohemian Waxwings in North America usually winter no farther south than Wyoming and the uppermost reaches of the northern Rockies, Plains and Midwest.

Interestingly, the abundant winter fruits these Colorado visitors are devouring are not native to the region, except perhaps for one-seeded junipers. The waxwing swarms go for domestic crabapples, junipers, hawthorns and others planted far and wide across metro Denver and the developed Front Range. They also make meals of common buckthorn, an invasive exotic that grows in large thickets with millions of berries.

Were we to venture back in time before the Front Range was settled and urbanized, none of these resources, except the native juniper, existed here — and it was mostly limited to parts of the foothills. Before Colorado bird records were first kept, waxwings would have found little or no reason to visit here.

So, as belatedly as this may be: Welcome, Bohemians, and thanks for visiting us!

David Suddjian, DFO’s Field Trips chair, came to Colorado in 2013 from his native California. Since 2016, he has led well over 320 DFO outings. He organized the club’s 2018 “Big Year” (362 species on DFO trips) and created DFO’s “Bird Bombs” webinar series on bird ID.



CONSERVATION

At disputed ex-golf course, a call to conserve urban bird habitat for Denver

Mike Fernandez

For the second time in two years, Denver city government will ask voters in the April 4 municipal election what they want to do with the former Park Hill Golf Course, a 155-acre patch of urban green space that closed in 2018. Voters answered a [similar ballot question](#) in November 2021, voting 64 percent against proposed redevelopment for businesses and housing and for conserving the open space for recreation.

This sort of thing will come as no surprise to DFO members. Wildlife habitat and migratory bird corridors are threatened by development everywhere, all the time, and this time won't be the last. Habitat loss is one of the main causes of bird mortality and species decline worldwide.

We can help fight that locally. Here in Denver, there are nearby examples of successful protection of urban open space for wildlife — the preservation of [Bluff Lake](#) and [Babi Yar Park](#), to name two. And there are parallel efforts elsewhere in Colorado. In Fort Collins, local activists succeeded in 2021 with a ballot question for the city to purchase and rezone the land where Colorado State University's Hughes Stadium once stood. Nearly 70 percent voted in favor, and soon after, the City Council unanimously rezoned it as public open lands. But as with Denver's Park Hill, land-use questions continue for that [stadium site reuse](#).

In the case of Park Hill, the Denver City Council and the [property's owner](#), Westside Investment Partners, Inc., want to remove a conservation easement that prohibits redevelopment of the defunct golf links. At best, their vision would preserve less than half the property as a city park. Green-space advocates want all of it to remain undeveloped. In mid-February, several of them (including [Save Open Space Denver](#)) sued in district court to preserve the parcel as "protected land."

History: In 1997, Denver paid \$2 million to place use restrictions on the land via a state-authorized conservation easement. Such measures serve to protect open space by reducing its potential value to commercial developers. But the current effort to remove the easement poses a powerful threat. With Denver's support, Westside wants to build up to [3,200 new homes plus retail businesses](#).

A birding hotspot: In 2010, while still operating, Park Hill Golf Course was listed as an [eBird hotspot](#), with 61 species recorded since then. Birders who have strolled the property have encountered, in season, songbirds like Western Kingbird, Red-winged Blackbird and Yellow-breasted Chat, raptors from Red-tailed and Swainson's hawk to Great Horned Owl, and wetland species from Great Blue Heron to Snowy Egret.

Continued on page 15



What you can do: If you're a Denver voter, learn where the candidates for City Council and mayor stand on Park Hill development. Then vote accordingly in the same April 4 municipal election. The council is a key player. It recently approved a variety of rezonings that could clear the zoning path for development.

Don't be fooled by campaign points that redevelopment would boost affordable housing and fill in a "food desert" neighborhood. Many nearby properties are available or under development for lower-cost homes and business infill. Although the developer's numbers frequently shift, dwelling units dedicated for low-to-moderate income residents comprise just 25 percent of the total.

What bird advocates say: Last year, Denver Audubon supported saving the site for parkland, saying Denver needs "large, unfragmented green space, outdoor recreation (and) play spaces," more vegetation to sequester carbon, and a larger urban tree canopy "to combat the heat island effect." It noted Denver's location in the Central Flyway that supports millions of seasonal migrant birds. In a January 2023 letter to members who live in Denver, it urged this action to stop loss of "stop-over habitat" for those birds and the "162 species that either nest or winter here." There are other places homes and commercial development can be built, "but open space, once lost, cannot be replaced, and is lost forever," it added.

The Conservation Committee of Denver Field Ornithologists has urged the city to maintain open lands as critical for migrating birds. "Regrettably, the proposed zoning essentially extinguishes" the open-space easement by designating "an urban, development-centered landscape over about one-half of the property," the committee wrote. The redevelopment scheme, it added, shows "little to no interest in providing the public a viable open space area that allows the experience of nature in the city."

DFO welcomes your thoughts and questions about this vital Denver issue. Write to me at mike@curu.org.

A post-script: As *The Lark Bunting* went to publication in late February, a *Denver Post* editorial urged voters to reject the easement change in the April 4 election — not to save open space but because the plan is "a sweetheart deal" that needs proper accounting for the value of the city's easement. "But the city can put the question on the ballot (again) in November," the editorial added.

A DFO member since 2014, **Mike Fernandez** edits the mid-month DFO Digest and is assistant editor of *The Lark Bunting*. A neighborhood and education advocate for 40 years, he is a retired Interior Department communications manager.

Will 10 weeks a year be as good as future birding gets at Chico Basin Ranch?

Patrick O'Driscoll

A bird-oriented nature blog on the [website of Chico Basin Ranch](#) describes the cattle operator's outlook in words that for years have been music to the ears of Front Range birders: "[Where the Gate Is Always Open.](#)"

Twenty-one months from now, that philosophy will change abruptly. On Jan. 1, 2025, a new and different livestock and agriculture lease will take effect at the state-owned ranch in El Paso and Pueblo counties, southeast of Colorado Springs. Access to one of Colorado's richest birdlife locales (more than 350 species recorded) will shift radically — for birders perhaps most of all.

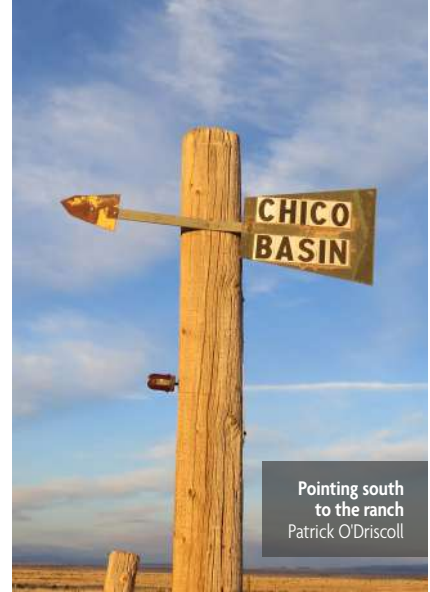
Although the status of birding thereafter is still under discussion, the present practice of self-guided, anytime visits is certain to end. As the Colorado State Land Board prepares to advertise for bids on the next ranching lease for the 86,000-acre spread, its vision of tighter control on non-agricultural activity is stark.

The land board staff wants to limit birding to just 10 weeks a year, all during spring and fall migration. That's 42 fewer weeks — 80 percent less availability for birding — than was possible annually for the past two-plus decades. It also wants to limit entry to 20 birders a day. It wants a birding leaseholder to carry two kinds of insurance, pay for portable toilets, set up a registration system, create and post signs, and more. It even proposes that the lessee grade the ranch's dirt-and-gravel roads.

Only one entity is in conversation with the land board about such a lease. Aiken Audubon, the Colorado Springs chapter of National Audubon, is the birding group closest geographically to the ranch. Some of its members visit Chico Basin weekly, if not more. But the state's initial demands for a birding leaseholder are a heavy lift for a volunteer organization with limited resources.

"I asked our prime birders that spend time at Chico, 'What would you settle for?'" said **Linda Hodges**, Aiken's conservation chair, treasurer and lead contact in lease discussions. "So we asked for (at least) 12 weeks of access" to catch peak migration mid-April through May and mid-August through September. "But (land board staff) said they would like to limit our time there to the same 10 weeks that the banding station folks would be there. The Bird Conservancy of the Rockies is there just 10 weeks a year, mainly in May and September."

Ten weeks is better than the land board's preposterous original suggestion — 2-4 days of birding a year under a lease costing \$2,500 to \$5,000 — but it is still severely limiting. Meanwhile, DFO and Colorado Field Ornithologists both have expressed support to help Aiken Audubon with funding and other assistance if it takes on the lease.



Pointing south
to the ranch
Patrick O'Driscoll



Sunrise at Chico Basin
Ranch gateway
Patrick O'Driscoll

Continued on page 17



Self-serve kiosk for birders
Patrick O'Driscoll



Ladder-backed Woodpecker
Patrick O'Driscoll



Chico Basin steer amid the cholla
Patrick O'Driscoll

Although the state now says it won't charge for the birding lease, the lessee would have to cover insurance, toilet rental and various other expenses from whatever it can collect from birders. Birding is *not* a money-making activity. The land board, however, wants the leaseholder to split any revenue 50-50 with the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies (which would be under its own lease) and provide a volunteer to help whenever school groups visit BCR's banding station.

This drastic shift is the result of a fundamental change in the state's leasing philosophy for Chico Basin, one of numerous properties the land board manages across Colorado for revenues to support public schools. It wants a stronger hand over all activities on its holdings.

Under the present lease, [Ranchlands](#), a multistate livestock business owned by the **Duke Phillips** family and based at Chico Basin, is free to regulate non-agricultural uses however it pleases. Once that lease expires, the land board will directly oversee all non-ranching activities itself. Birding, hunting, the banding station and more would be under individual leases. Even if Ranchlands successfully rebids to remain Chico Basin's livestock operator, its benevolent management of non-ag activities will cease.

That prospect was already bad news for birders, who have recorded collectively more than 9,500 eBird checklists for the ranch's eight hotspots. They include scores of DFO members who visit on club field trips that fill up quickly several times a year. Welcoming and birder-friendly, Ranchlands has made access open and easy: Drive in, sign in, leave a modest \$10 to \$15-a-head fee at a self-serve kiosk outside ranch headquarters, and go birding.

The land board staff has indicated that separate agreements with non-ag users are meant to minimize conflicts with ranching operations. Hodges and Aiken have asked: What conflicts? Whenever it needs to, Ranchlands closes access, notifies Aiken and posts why on the ranch website — whether moving and managing cattle near key birding spots, for instance, or when bad weather renders some ranch roads impassable. The rest of the time? Birders are out of sight, out of mind.

"The Phillips family has said we have caused no problems as birders," said Hodges. "We've been (birding at the ranch), most of us, for over 15 years and some of us longer. The thought that somehow we're going to interfere with cattle operations, I don't know where they get such wild ideas. I've told (land board staff) that in all these years, I have never *even* seen cattle when I've gone there."

Still, Hodges said, "they want the (next) lessee to know that in these months or on these days, there may be birders on these parts of the property. They've even suggested that birders let the ranch know 48 hours in advance when they're coming — each individual birder. As I've told them, when we have a group going out there, we always let the ranch know — and they don't care. We're not in their way."

Continued on page 18

For one thing, the ranch sprawls across more than 134 square miles, but birders use only a tiny fraction of it. They visit half a dozen or so ponds and a creek, groves, meadows and other locations that birds favor, almost all within 10-15 minutes' drive from the main gate. "In my 15 years, maybe three times I've seen ranch staff out there," said Hodges. "It's just . . . you don't run into people or livestock. We've encountered a few horses and a donkey. None cared."

For now, Aiken Audubon is on the clock. The land board wants to button up non-ag leases before it issues a formal "request for proposals" (RFP for short) to prospective ranch-lease bidders sometime this spring or summer. "We have gone back and forth many times," Hodges said. "There are a couple of issues we're still working out."

One is the potential loss of year-round birding data at such an important location. Hodges said she has asked to have at least one day of birder access in each non-migration month to lessen that loss and keep a bare semblance of year-round birdlife observation: "It's not like we really *want* to go out there in the January depths of winter, but we do want to know what's there."

Roads are another issue. "They said we should pay for grading, pedestrian gates and 'signage.' That was very vague," Hodges said. Birders' cars may have some nominal effect on ranch roads, but Ranchlands "thought it excessive" that anyone other than the cattle operator be responsible for that. If the land board insists, a birding lessee would have to pay someone — perhaps the next ranch operator onsite, or a road grader from somewhere else — to perform that duty.

In addition, Aiken Audubon members need ranch access every June for the annual Breeding Bird Survey, a decades-old assessment of nesting bird populations statewide. If the land board won't budge on its 10-week offer, "we might have to contact the ranch directly" to ask for future permissions, Hodges said.

Still other questions await answers. What to charge birders to cover new costs that are just ordinary overhead under the ranch's present lease? Will birding have to be by appointment? Escorted? Groups only? And will Aiken have enough volunteers to help at the banding station? "Most of our board works," Hodges said. "We have one of the younger boards of any Audubon chapter that I know. But due to location, we're the ones."



Pronghorn pair
Patrick O'Driscoll



Townsend's Solitaire
Patrick O'Driscoll



FROM THE FIELD WITH DAVID SUDDJIAN

March Madness? How 'bout February Funniness?

David Suddjian

A stated aim of every Denver Field Ornithologist field trip is for birders to have fun. It's right there in our club's list of standards for field trip leaders:

*Field trips should be interesting to and inclusive of all levels of birding skill. Strive to make field trips informative and **fun***

In the frozen depths of February's ebb, birding can still excite and satisfy, but given the conditions, it's usually a bit less than fun. Winter's cold edge is still hard. Few "new" birds are being seen. Some winter rarities have left altogether, even died. Migration and its thrilling variety are still far off.

Against that rather foul backdrop, DFO's field trips in this February made for the most fun ever in the shortest month of the year. For one thing, we led TWENTY-TWO trips in just 26 days! — way more than either of the two 31-day months before it. We also introduced a "little big week" of short, daily, geographically focused daily field outings. Plus, two words: Bohemian Waxwings!

If you missed some or all of the February Funniness, enjoy this recap of the highlights — and join in the "funness" next year!



DFO field trippers during
February Little Big Week
Gary Witt



More Little Big Week birding
David Suddjian

FEBRUARY 5: NORTHEAST RAPTOR TOUR

Longtime trip leader **Joey Kellner**'s annual northeast Colorado excursion for prairie raptors logged [20 eBird checklists](#). Boy, did it ever deliver. Besides three dozen other species, there were 12 species of birds of prey: Golden and Bald eagles, Cooper's Hawk, Northern Harrier, Red-tailed, Rough-legged, and Ferruginous hawks, Eastern Screech-Owl, Long-eared Owl, American Kestrel, Merlin, and Prairie Falcon. And for good measure, a Northern Shrike (perched with a Greater Prairie Chicken).

FEBRUARY 10-12: DFO'S SUPER BOWL WEEKEND

A four-trip blitz over the three-day Super Bowl weekend showed off DFO's expert field skills, with outings into four parts of Colorado for a total of [86 species checklisted on eBird](#). On Friday, I led to Park County for mountain birds. On Saturday, **Nate Bond** and **Diane Roberts** did Pueblo for its specialties and good winter waterbirds. On a two-fer Sunday, **Donna Stumpp** and **Peter Ruprecht** led their popular Boulder County raptor tour, while **Anne Craig** and I refereed a different kind of game on the Clear Creek Trail in Wheat Ridge.

Continued on page 20

FEBRUARY 12: SUPER DUCK SUNDAY

The Clear Creek Trail trip kicked off Super Bowl Sunday with our own big game: Dabblers vs. Divers! Each duck species we found scored a 7-point touchdown for that kind of duck's "team." So Gadwall meant 7 points for Dabblers, while Common Goldeneye was a TD for Divers. Spotting courtship behavior scored a 3-point field goal, and any act of duck copulation this early scored a touchdown, too. DFO oddsmakers had diving ducks as 2:1 favorites (more diverse at Clear Creek), but dabbling ducks are friskier on the mating field. Late in the fourth quarter, Divers led by one, 42-41, when we all saw an unexpectedly early coupling of Mallards in a pond south of the creek. SCORE! The final: [Dabblers 48, Divers 42](#). MVP? Mallard, of course, with two critical courtship field goals to go with that copulation TD.

FEBRUARY 14: AVIAN LOVE IN THE AIR

To warm winter's chill on Valentine's Day, we made this theme field trip a hunt for bird romance: How many of Cupid's arrows would we spy? Frisky courting ducks, songful finches, drumming woodpeckers, and maybe even nest building. We humans shared chocolates and homemade Valentines.

FEBRUARY 20: DENVER DUCKS

Jason Bidgood led this "Developing birder" trip with guest guide **George Ho** to help birders enjoy ducks in Denver's Washington Park and Overland Park hotspots. Archived video of Our BIRD BOMBS "Better Duck" session was used as a pre-trip resource, and there was lots of time for questions, discussion, and quizzes. The group recorded 12 species of ducks. Check out George's wonderful images on the trip's two eBird checklists: [Wash Park](#), [Overland Park](#).

FEBRUARY 20-26: LITTLE BIG WEEK

As mentioned above, this was something different: Seven straight days of seven short trips, all in Littleton, all led by me. We had a great time finding scarce winter birds in many spots inside a limited area. Our goal was at least 60 species. We found 63! Seven trips in seven days is challenging, especially when a snowstorm strikes in the middle, plus three days of cold near zero or below. From our pre-trip wish list of 93 possible species, our Little(ton) Big Week found 44 of 45 "expected," 16 of 25 "maybes," and three of 23 less likely possibilities. [Click here for the week's complete eBird report](#), and [click here for the day-by-day updates](#) posted on the DFO Facebook Group page.

FEBRUARY'S "WAXWING FIESTA"

Nothing was more fun this month than finding flocks of Bohemian Waxwings (and Cedar Waxwings, too) during what has become Colorado's Great Waxwing Fiesta for winter 2022-23. Although there were many big flocks, smaller groups and individuals across metro Denver and the Front Range, they were still unpredictable and a challenge to find. DFO has tallied Bohemians on eight field trips this winter (and still counting). We've helped many birders claim and enjoy a "lifer" bird, and several encounters were spectacular . . . and (all together now) FUN!

FIELD TRIPS

DFO, Aiken Audubon explore partnership for joint field trips

Denver Field Ornithologists and [Aiken Audubon](#), the Colorado Springs chapter of National Audubon, are working to create shared field trips focused on destinations in Aiken's Pikes Peak region. DFO Field Trip Committee chair **David Suddjian** and Aiken field trip coordinator **Melanie Helton** have mapped out a proposed partnership to integrate the bird-focused organizations' field trip programs.

Under the plan, some or all Aiken field trips would be offered jointly with DFO, with registration hosted on DFO's webpage. An icon and special designation on the signup page would indicate a jointly sponsored field trip. Like all participants in DFO's field trip program (members or not), Aiken members would sign up there for these and any other trips.

Aiken Audubon trip leaders also would be certified to lead bird outings for DFO (several leaders have been already). Besides training, certified leaders would benefit from DFO website features that aid trip management, as well as the program's best practices and structure. A collaboration also would allow DFO to gain new affiliate leaders who live and lead trips south of the metro Denver area, adding more outings and new and varied birding locations.

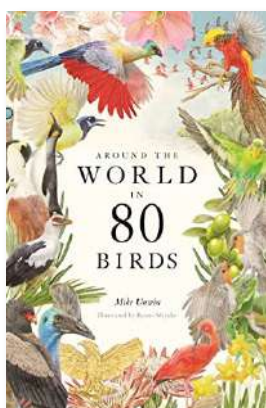
Watch here for further details as the two clubs work to create this new partnership.



Inspiration: Four bird books with travel in mind

Jill Boice

What birder doesn't enjoy daydreaming about new target species or traveling to new locations for a bonanza of new species? Here's a selection of bird-related books that will feed your daydreams with a cornucopia of ideas and destinations. Even if you're not planning to visit far-flung points abroad or closer places here in the US, these books will provide hours of enjoyment for armchair travelers as well.



Around the World in 80 Birds

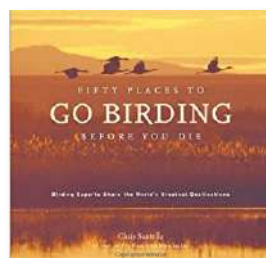
By Mike Unwin

Laurence King Publishing (2022)

224 pages

I'm listing this book first because, in all honesty, it's the one I read the most. **Mike Unwin** selected birds that have special meaning culturally in a wide swath of countries. There are 2-3 pages of text about each bird and charming illustrations by Ryuto Miyake. All are very readable and contain information that often was entirely unfamiliar to me. A good example is the "avian Pied Piper," the Greater Honeyguide. This pink-billed passerine guides

the people of the Kafue woodlands of Zambia to beehives in tree cavities and feasts on the larvae and wax after the humans take the honey. I particularly like Unwin's style and would also recommend his *The Atlas of Birds*.



Fifty Places to Go Birding Before You Die

Birding Experts Share The World's Greatest Destinations

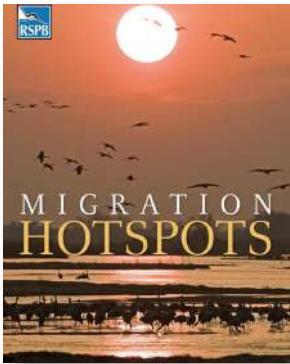
Edited by Chris Santella

Stewart, Tabori & Chang (2007)

224 pages

Chris Santella has written other books in this series, e.g., *Fifty Places to Go Golfing Before You Die* and so on. He even admits he is not an "avid birder" himself. But he interviewed a host of people in the birding world who are. He has assembled their accounts in a fun-to-browse picture book. The segments for each of the destinations are 3-4 pages long, with good photos and an "If You Go" section that covers best times to visit, suggested birding guides and accommodations. For instance, **Kenn Kaufman**, the renowned guidebook author and naturalist (one of DFO's first guest speakers via Zoom back in 2020), describes here the joys of the Tandayapa-Mindo valleys in Ecuador. Although this book is a little dated after almost 16 years, the birding opportunities are likely to be as fresh as ever.

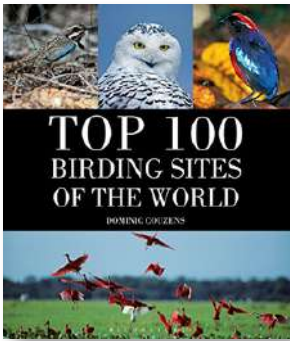
Continued on page 22



RSPB Migration Hotspots The World's Best Bird Migration Sites

By Tim Harris / Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
Windmill Books (2013)
224 pages

If ever there was a browsable book for international bird travelers, this is it. **Tim Harris** presents 29 of the world's greatest hotspots for birds on their seasonal journeys. He writes that he chose these locations to include at least one along each of the world's eight major flyways "while maintaining a balance between spectacular wildfowl flyways, raptor bottlenecks, and passerine" sites. Each selection has an overview of major birds by season, a map, the key locations in the area and nearby, and, to some extent, conservation threats. Excellent photographs accompany an interesting text. Many birders may already know some of these hotspots, but there are sure to be new ones for birders of any level. How about Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt in autumn for the White Stork migration, Beidaihe, China for a fallout of chats, or Eliat, Israel for migrating [Squacco Herons](#) and other spring waders?



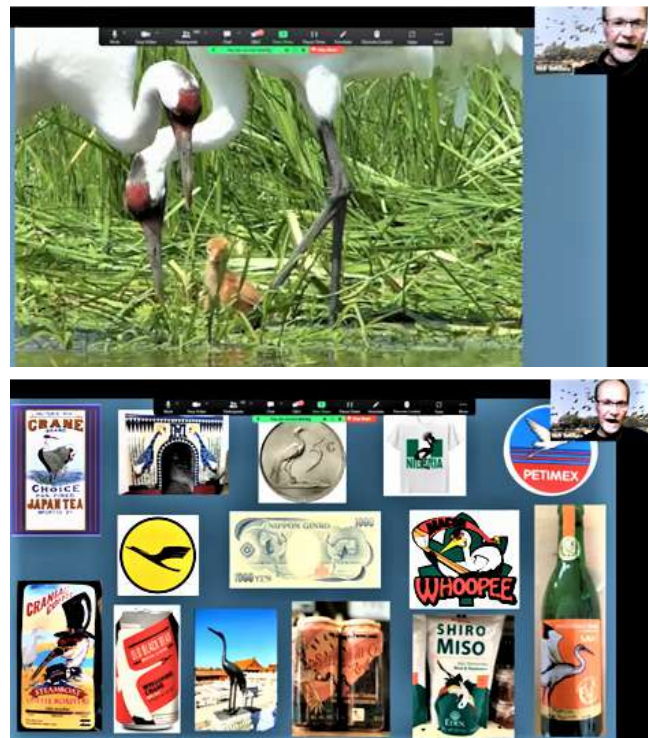
Top 100 Birding Sites of the World

By Dominic Couzens
University of California Press (2008)
320 pages

Dominic Couzens has produced a beautiful coffee table book, because this large-format volume really is something to just leaf through. He writes that he chose these places based on "the sheer quality of birds" in them, "the degree to which the site is good for birding all year," and the "possibility of delighting in other features," among other factors. He devotes 2-3 pages to each, with good photos and the highlights of each spot. Three fun examples: the "superb collection of owls" at Oulu in Northern Finland, the [Cape Sugarbirds](#) at Sir Lowry's Pass in South Africa, and Cotingas at the Canopy Tower in Panama.

Jill Boice, who joined DFO in 2001, leads occasional slow field trips. She is also a volunteer raptor monitor at Cherry Creek State Park.

Elegant, tall and very nurturing parents, cranes “resonate with people,” Beilfuss said. “They’ve been with us for millennia.” More than 30 crane festivals celebrate the species around the world, including two in Colorado (Monte Vista and Yampa Valley). And cranes are embedded in so many countries and cultures: In government (on flags, 70 countries’ postage



He singled out efforts to preserve Africa's rare Wattled Crane (10,000 birds) and Gray-crowned Crane (30,000), which inhabit Kafue Flats, a 1,500-square-mile floodplain of wetlands in Zambia. It is also home to herds of aquatic antelope.

23

wildebeest, water buffalo, zebras, hippopotamus, 470 other bird species — and more and more humans. Cattle grazers, poachers and a brisk urban market for bushmeat are squeezing out the antelope. Most wild species are in alarming decline, with “a catastrophic effect on a lot of the birdlife.”

A glimmer of hope is a 20-year agreement to restore and manage the wetlands. It involves and employs local communities in removal of invasive weeds and floodplain management and research. “Cranes inspire us to solve big problems,” Beilfuss said, including protecting and restoring “healthy landscapes that we need for cranes, but for people, too.”

Closer to home, he spotlighted the Sandhill Cranes that migrate over Colorado and the rarest-of-rare Whooping Cranes, some of which mingle with Sandhills. He reviewed the painstaking recovery of Whoopers from the brink of extinction, “a conservation story in progress” with 863 total birds today. Sandhills, too, “are definitely a success story,” having recovered from widespread decimation by 19th century marketing hunting.

Beilfuss credits the Migratory Bird Treaty Act with ending that trade. He also credits “the willingness of farmers to support crane recovery” in the Midwest. Sandhills today are the most numerous crane species on Earth. More than 1 million birds migrate annually through Nebraska, where their stopping over makes the Platte River, he added, “kind of the Serengeti of the United States.”

Click here to view the complete video of
“**Cranes: Ambassadors for Conservation**”
with Rich Beilfuss in the Past Programs archive



Sage-Grouse program review next month

The Feb. 27 evening program — “Greater Sage-Grouse: Largest Conservation Effort in US History” with **Daly Edmunds** from Audubon of the Rockies — fell too close to *The Lark Bunting*’s publication deadline to include a written review in this issue. We will publish our review in next month’s newsletter.

In the meantime, if you were unable to attend her presentation live on Zoom, you can view the program recording via this link to the DFO “[Past Programs](#)” [webpage](#).



Sandhill Cranes
Jim Esten

Welcome to new DFO members

January

Jessi and Jose Barrientos of Westminster; Mark Bennett, Arvada; Terry Bezouska, Denver; Ellen Bracchi, Arvada; Emily Bray, Hygiene; Pete and Ann Christensen, Denver; Carol Kay Condit, Loveland; Sonjia Enck, Denver; Rachael Falgout, Denver; Wendi Fisher, Arvada; Kate Frost, Centennial; Deb Geolat, Monument; Jacqueline Gorman, Denver; Scott Hammel, Englewood; Kathy Hawkins, Denver; Heather Ingraham, Denver; Luke Jaramillo; Littleton; Janet Johnston, Centennial; Sally Paler and Jodi Chambers, Denver; Jannette Guerrasio and Lara Juliusson, Denver; Debbie and Matthew Kozak, Littleton; Shari Leyshon, Boulder; Krissie Lynch, Ravenna; Katherine Roben, Centennial; Nitha Ujwal, Daya Dipu and Dipu Sukumaran, Parker; Joseph Tuttle, Fairplay, and Phil Waltz, Littleton

February

Joan Akiyama, Denver; Brady Anderson, Greenwood Village; Erica Borresen and Jeff Birek, Westminster; Alison Bishop, Sarasota, FL; Roy and Joann Carrillo, Thornton; Susan Cooper and Jim Long, Boulder; Nathan Crow, Parker; Virginia Dickinson, Denver; Colleen Dorczuk, Arvada; Deb Durand – Erie; Donna and Terry Flageolle, Westminster; Hannah Huse; Boulder; Leslie Jagoda, Englewood; Jackie Jazo, Lone Tree; Anna Joy Lehmickie and Clark Jones, Colorado Springs; Amy Manning, Lakewood; Kaitlyn Parkins, Fort Collins; Amanda Parramore, Denver; Andi Poland, Highlands Ranch; Bonnie Prado, Littleton; Kelli Reidford; Lakewood; Paula Rosson and Brian Huculak, Arvada; Becky Russell, Denver; Michelle Trotter, Denver, and Patricia Wilson, Denver

Thank you for your contribution

Research, Education and Conservation Grants Fund

Kevin and Diane Birks, Chris Blakeslee, Karel Buckley, Nathan Crow, Linda Doran, Janet and A.J. Gest, John and Peggy Gonder, Jacqueline Gorman, Scott Hammel, Sharon Kermiet, Roger Koester, Brian Johnson, Tina Jones, Richard Maslow, Philip McNichols, Tamra Moore, and Elaine Wagner

Friends of DFO

Kathy Barnum, John Chanin and Holly Sollod, Nathan Crow, Scott Hammel, Terry and Becca Hammons, Tina Jones, Mary Beth Searles, Jennifer and Charles Thornton-Kolbe, and Robyn and Jeremy Winick

DFO's Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch

Bev Baker, Kathy Barnum, Scott Hammel, Tina Jones, Cynthia Madsen, Colleen Nunn, Andi Poland, and Michelle Trotter





LAST LOOK, LAST WORD

In skies filled with Bohemian Waxwings, how to count the biggest swarms?

*Before this winter's epic irruption in Colorado, DFO member **Gregg Goodrich** had seen Bohemian Waxwings only twice before — a single bird both times. But since New Year's Day, he has seen the species more than 17 times (and counting), including two of the largest flocks reported this season. We asked Gregg to explain how he counted them, and why Bohemians captivate him so.*



Top: **Two Bohemians take flight** (Gregg Goodrich)
Bottom: **Bohemian Waxwing at Lakewood's Main Reservoir** (Rob Raker)

Gregg Goodrich

Like just about every other birder this winter, **Ann Troth** and I joined the Front Range chase for irrupting Bohemian Waxwings in early January. We never expected, though, to encounter what we found along East Hampden Avenue, on the boundary between south Denver and north Arapahoe County.

It was mid-morning on Jan. 17, and we had already tried for the species at what had become a front-row seat on the Bohemian storm: [Mamie Eisenhower Park](#) and a wooded stretch of the High Line Canal between South Colorado Boulevard and I-25. It seemed like everyone was seeing them there. That included me, by myself, eight days earlier. So I had brought Ann back there early to see them.

Just our luck: Not a waxwing in sight. Leaving the park, we turned west onto Hampden to drive home. As Denver's [Wellshire Golf Course](#) came into view on the right, I noticed masses of birds clustered in the tops of several trees. Starlings? No, too numerous. Robins? No, too close together. I suspected Bohemians.

After finding a side street south, we jaywalked across Hampden (scary). From outside the west edge of the course, I got several pictures of Wellshire's treetop flock. My first thought was 250, maybe even 400 or 500 birds. But I like certainty. As I snapped more pictures, we scanned them in the trees and on the ground. We found only one Cedar Waxwing among all those Bohemians. Hard to believe, right? But we looked very carefully, and I reviewed all 29 photos later to confirm it.

We knew the huge flock could fly off at any moment, so when it did minutes later, my camera was ready. As the flock circled back and forth before departing, I fired off shots with my zoom lens at 300 mm. Quickly realizing I wasn't capturing the whole swarm, I pulled back to 70 mm and managed several more shots of a sky filled with birds. That left the tricky part: How to count the hundreds of dots in those camera images?

When we got home, I took a low-tech approach, enlarging and printing my best in-flight shot on an 8½ x 11 sheet of paper to count by hand. But when I kept losing track in the cloud of dots, I tried another low-tech trick. With pencil and ruler, I crisscrossed the image into 1-inch blocks (70 squares in a 7 x 10 grid), then counted the distinctive specks inside each of them, block by block. It took me a while, but when I finally added them up, the actual count for my [eBird checklist](#) was astonishing: 823 Bohemian Waxwings — two to three times my first guess!



Bohemians on pine branch (Gregg Goodrich)

Continued on page 28

At that point, it was the largest sighting of this irruption. Eleven days later, I would count 841 just a block from my house in Highlands Ranch (a much harder tree count, branch by branch). I've since heard of other estimates over 1,000.

Most of the time when I chase a rare bird, I am content to see it once. But these guys were so frequent, so relatively easy to find, and just SO cool, I wanted to see them again and again. I love this bird!

Perched up high with silky plumage, boldly colored accents, black masks, and swept-back crests, they appear almost aloof, standoffish. Maybe even mean-looking, as our late DFO friend **Joe Roller** said in one of his eBird sightings years ago. But Bohemians actually are very social. They fly and perch in tight-knit groups. They share with the whole flock the food resources they discover.

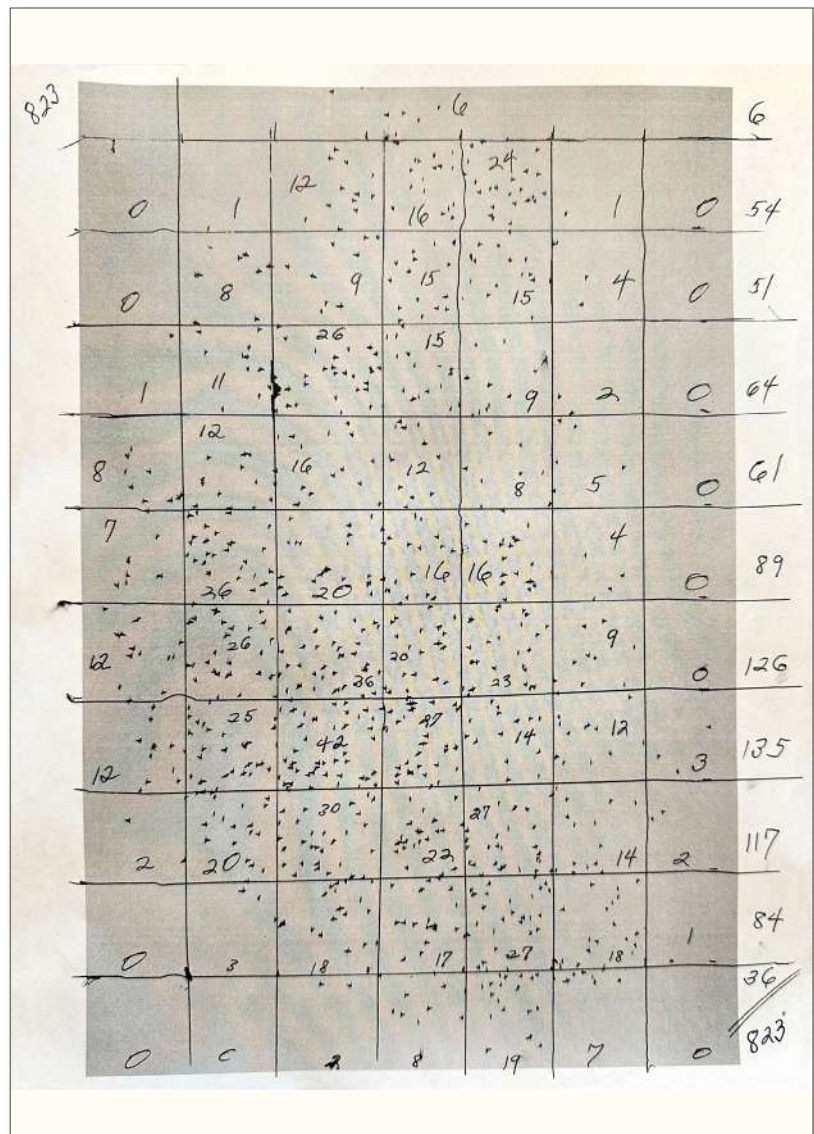
Using the group “radar,” they are expert at finding fruiting plants (crabapples, junipers, buckthorns and more). They perch in taller trees near the fruit source, then take turns dropping down in groups to consume the bounty. Cornell's *Birds of the World* says they are monogamous and non-territorial on their breeding grounds. With no need to sing in defense of territory, they emit cool calls instead: distinctive, ringing trills.

My irruption obsession has taken me back through 75 years and 215 checklists of eBird sightings of four or more Bohemian Waxwings (**Hugh Kingery's** suggestion) in the six-county Denver metro area. Of 11 irruption years in that span, I found the closest previous was 15 years ago, in winter 2007-08. Two years prior to that there was a large irruption from late November to late March, including one “conservative” sighting of 2,000 birds in Adams County. The 1990s had just one irruption (winter 1990-91), but the 1980s had five, including Kingery's own sighting of 1,000 birds in early 1988. Since eBird didn't start until 2002, the older records are incomplete. So thank you to **Bob Andrews** for entering your historical data into eBird from the 1960s through 1980s. As more historical records are entered and more birders use eBird, the data will improve.

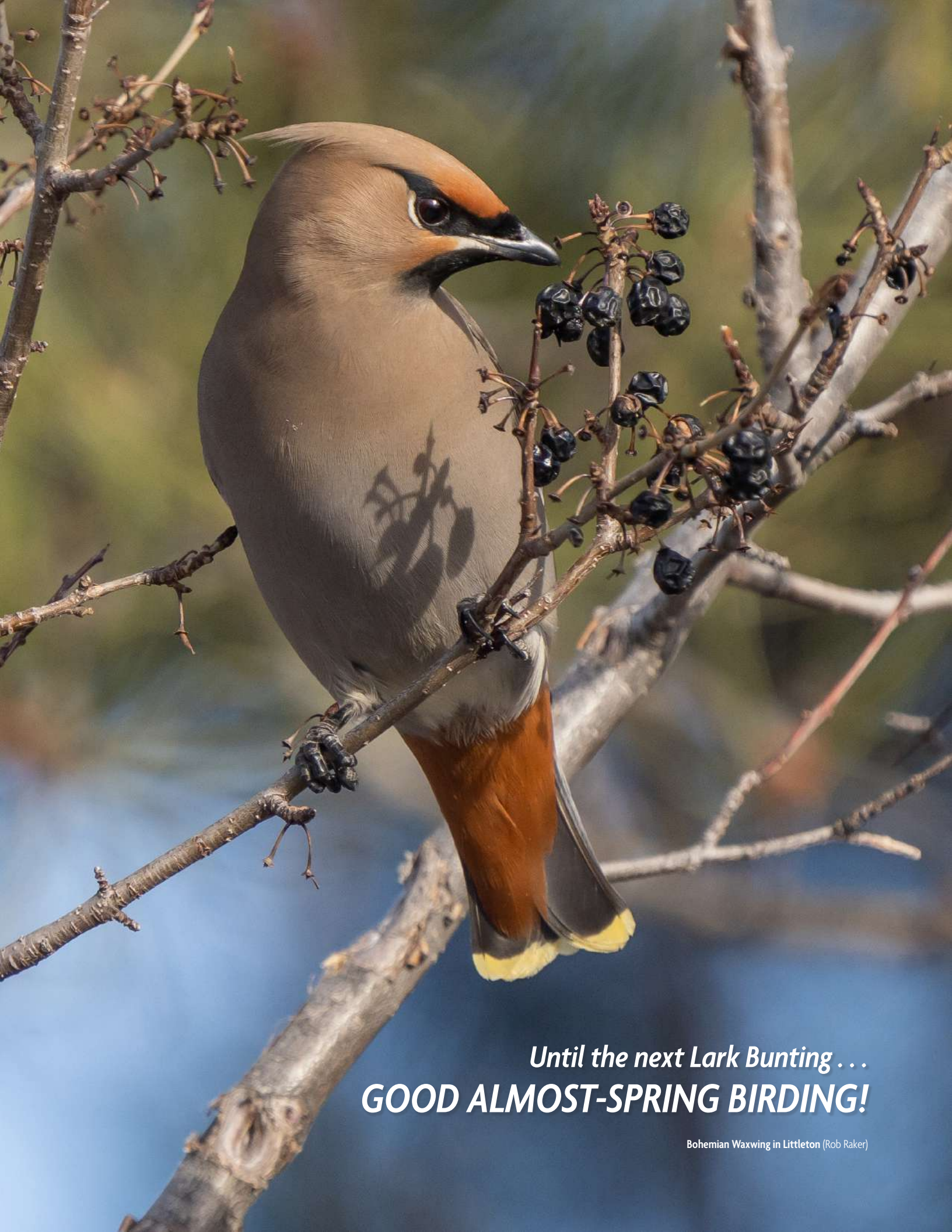
Statewide, Colorado averages an irruption every three years. And the Boulder Christmas Bird Count once held National Audubon CBC's all-time highest Bohemian Waxwing count in the continental US: 11,284 individual birds in one day in 1987!

So pardon the irruption and enjoy this one while it lasts. It sure has been fun.

Gregg Goodrich, a birder for about two decades, joined DFO in 2015 and has led field trips and served on the Field Trip Committee. A retired computer network analyst, he also enjoys bicycling and has climbed all 58 of Colorado's 14'ers.



Goodrich drew a grid over this photocopy of his shot of the massive flock



Until the next Lark Bunting . . .
GOOD ALMOST-SPRING BIRDING!

Bohemian Waxwing in Littleton (Rob Raker)



THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 59 | ISSUE 05 | MAY 2023

DFOBIRDS.ORG

PROGRAMS

A year of “Bird Bombs”:
More to drop in '23

PAGE 17

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Goodbye and hello:
'Tis the season

PAGE 5

PEOPLE

So long to DFO's
membership guru

PAGE 15

LAST WORD, LAST LOOK

Pretty + gritty:
Urban birds on razor's edge

PAGE 22

dfo
DENVER FIELD
ORNITHOLOGISTS



Sandhill Crane
Jim Esten
Monte Vista NWR



A DFO member since 2014, **Jim Esten** is photo editor of

The Lark Bunting. He took photos on and off for 35 years before getting his first digital camera in 2001. He first focused on birds a decade ago while visiting Florida. He is retired from network IT service.

ON THE COVER

Sandhill Crane: Calling from Colorado skies

We hear them before we see them, don't we? Up there . . . No, wait: over *there* . . . *SOMEwhere*, anyway. We crane our necks. Where ARE they?

Across metro Denver and points east, it's a common experience when migrating Sandhill Cranes (*Antigone canadensis*) pass over in spring and fall. We hear them before we ever see them. And when we see them, it comes almost by surprise. They're way up there, but they sound nearby, just over the shoulder. What are they, flying ventriloquists?

Taxonomists and guidebooks describe their distinctive call as "trumpeting" or "bugling." To me, it's a rolling rattle, a melodic but prehistoric purr. (In silhouette, they remind me a little of pterodactyls.) But when tens of thousands rest-stop in Nebraska each spring along the Great Bend of the Platte River, the calls rise together in a [deafening, high-pitched roar](#). And yet, in smaller groups crossing over Colorado, the calls seem individual — [piercing yet sweet](#), almost frail for such a large bird.

Maybe that's the magic of their passing overhead. We rarely see them on the ground here, but we are fortunate to enjoy their brief, semi-annual appearances elsewhere. We celebrate them in early March at the [Monte Vista Crane Festival](#) down in the San Luis Valley, and in early September at the [Yampa Valley Crane Festival](#) over in Steamboat Springs. The drive from Denver to Nebraska's spring crane mecca is only an hour or two longer. And in fall and winter, drives south lead Colorado birders to crane encampments in New Mexico, southeast Arizona and even Texas.

This month's elegant cover bird was one of the thousands at Monte Vista NWR this year. **Jim Esten**, photo editor of *The Lark Bunting*, found it and its mate dancing, late in the day on March 13, among 150 others strung out along a roadside pond off Highway 15 south of town. When Jim encounters dancing cranes, they're usually hopping up and down amidst hundreds of others — a cool sight but lousy for capturing on camera. "But this pair," he said, "were dancing by themselves. I just got lucky."

They're primordial. The earliest known Sandhill Crane fossil is 2.5 million years old. Alive, the oldest known bird reached more than 37 years of age. They mate for life and remain together year-round. Chicks can leave the nest and even swim within 8 hours, but they stick close to their parents for most of the first year. They also take their time starting to breed — some as soon as age 2, others as late as 7 or 8.

Cornell's [Birds of the World](#) tells us there are six subspecies, sorted into six migrant populations (including Mid-Continent and Rocky Mountain in and around Colorado) and three non-migrant populations (Florida, Mississippi and Cuba).

Finally, a most fun fact: The Sandhill owes its athletic vocal array — from throaty trills to loud rattles, soft purrs, snores, moans and honks — to an extraordinarily long windpipe. Coiling down behind the sternum, the trachea can create all manner of reverberations and modulations.

— **Patrick O'Driscoll**, editor



IN THIS ISSUE

- 2 On the Cover**
Sandhill Crane:
Calling from Colorado skies
- 5 From the President**
Thank you, DFO friends . . .
and welcome, new ones
- 7 DFO News Notes**
- 10 Program Previews**
- 12 DFO Election**
Time to vote! Here are 2023's DFO
officer and board candidates for
April election
- 15 DFO People**
One for the books: Thanks to
longtime membership guru
Mary Cay Burger
- 17 DFO Programs**
BIRD BOMBS away? One year in,
look out: More will drop in 2023!
- 19 February Program Review**
Up, down, up again? The uncertain
saga of the Greater Sage-Grouse
- 22 Last Look, Last Word**
City birds, pretty birds —
even amidst trucks, machinery . . .
and razor wire

The Lark Bunting newsletter of Denver Field Ornithologists is published online monthly at dfobirds.org except for joint issues in July–August and February–March.

PUBLICATION STAFF

Editor

Patrick O'Driscoll

Assistant Editor

Mike Fernandez

Photo Editor

Jim Esten

Layout and Design

Jennie Dillon

Contributors this issue

William Anderson, Michael Baum, Susan Blansett, Jill Boice, Mary Cay Burger, Jim Esten, John Fielder, Mary Geder, Chuck Hundertmark, Kyra Johnson, "Little Wing," Melody Serra, David Suddjian, Bill Turner

CONTRIBUTE TO THE NEWSLETTER

Submit original articles or story ideas to the editor at patodrisk@gmail.com.

Send image-file photos of birds or bird outings to the photo editor at jcesten@gmail.com.

Editors reserve the right to accept and edit suitable articles and photos for publication.

NEWSLETTER ADVERTISING

The Lark Bunting does not accept or contain paid advertising. DFO **AdBIRDtisements** are FREE to club members to seek or sell bird-related equipment, supplies, books and decorative items (artwork, photos, clothing, note cards, etc.).

- Ads must include name, email and/or telephone number, and may include weblink if items offered online
- Ads may be edited for inappropriate content or excessive length (125-word limit); ONE photo or image per ad
- Ads do not carry over each month. To renew, resubmit by next deadline
- Available *only* to DFO members
- Deadline: last day of month except January and June (*The Lark Bunting* does not publish in February and July)

Send AdBIRDtisement materials to editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com.

Next deadline: Friday, April 30



© 2023 Denver Field Ornithologists. All rights reserved



**A community of birders,
learning and acting together
for avian wildlife**

Denver Field Ornithologists is an all-volunteer organization that conducts hundreds of free birdwatching field trips throughout the year and welcomes participation and membership by all. DFO promotes enjoyment of nature, the study of birds, and protection of them and their habitats in greater Denver and beyond.

In addition to field trips, evening programs and birding workshops, DFO conducts community science in the field, including the spring Hawk Watch raptor migration count on Dinosaur Ridge.

DFO awards grants annually for bird-related research, education and conservation projects in Colorado. For more information, visit the [Research, Education & Conservation Grants](#) page on the DFO website.

DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and financial contributions to DFO's three giving funds are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

DFO OFFICERS

President

Susan Blansett
susan.blansett@gmail.com

Vice President

Sharon Tinianow
sharontinianow@gmail.com

Secretary (interim)

Nathan Bond
dfobirds.secretary@gmail.com

Treasurer

Kathy Holland
kcloudview@comcast.net

Past President

David Hill
davidhill2357@gmail.com

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Karen Drozda
drozforte@aol.com

Mary Geder
mfg5000@live.com

Tina Jones
tjcalliope@hotmail.com

Roger Koester
koester1949@gmail.com

Patrick O'Driscoll
patodrisk@gmail.com

David Suddjian
dsuddjian@gmail.com

Bill Turner
toursbyturner@aol.com

Elaine Wagner
eWagner1000@yahoo.com

COMMITTEE CHAIRS AND ROLES

Better Birding Skills

Sharon Tinianow (acting)
sharontinianow@gmail.com

Communications & Outreach

Sharon Tinianow
sharontinianow@gmail.com

Conservation

Vacant

Field Trips

David Suddjian
davidsuddjian@gmail.com

Finance

Roger Koester
koester1949@gmail.com

Grants

Elaine Wagner
eWagner1000@yahoo.com

Hawk Watch

Janet Peters
j.f.peters58@gmail.com

Membership

Cyndy Johnson (interim)
cyndyjohnson28@gmail.com

Nominations

Mary Geder
mfg5000@live.com

Programs Director

Bill Turner
toursbyturner@aol.com

Historian

Kristine Haglund
kahaglund1@aol.com

Web Administrator

Jim Esten
admin@dfobirds.org

Zoom Coordinator

Peter Stoltz
dfobirds.zoom@gmail.com

DFO ONLINE

Website

dfobirds.org

Facebook Group

facebook.com/groups/dfobirds

Instagram

instagram.com/denverfieldornithologists

CONTACT

Email

dfocommsgroup@gmail.com

Via website

dfobirds.org

[Located at the bottom of the homepage](#)

US Mail

Attn: Kathy Holland
Treasurer, DFO
351 E Caley Ave
Centennial, CO 80121-2201

LEARN MORE

Membership — Join or Renew

dfobirds.org/DFO/Membership

Field Trips — Explore / Sign Up

dfobirds.org/FieldTrips.aspx

Volunteering

dfobirds.org/DFO/Volunteer.aspx

Charitable Giving

dfobirds.org/DFO/Donations.aspx

DFO Merch Store

zazzle.com/store/official_dfo_shop



FROM THE PRESIDENT

Thank you, DFO friends . . . and welcome, new ones

Every year at this time, an old verse echoes back to me in my mother's voice:

*Spring has sprung,
the grass is riz,
I wonder where the flowers is?*

Mom's cheerful refrain, uttered in the first warm days of our Illinois spring, originated somewhere in New York in the 1940s. An alternate version trades the last line for a question we all have asked and can answer:

*I wonder where the **birdies** is?*

Many are already winging north from winters in Mexico, Central and South America. (How I wish I had a ticket to Houston for a mid-April fallout at [High Island!](#)) Although perilously early, I hang my hummingbird feeders out the first day of April, hoping a rare southerly wind might coax a hungry hummer into the yard. It's also hard not to plunge gloved hands into garden dirt before May, even if my dormant perennials need that protective blanket of winter detritus a while longer. I don't care if we get another snowfall or three — SPRING IS HERE, forecasts be damned!

In the spring new birders often join our DFO ranks. It's easy to see why: Birding IS the coolest hobby on the planet. You can bird anywhere, as long or as briefly as time allows, alone or with others. All you need is a bird guide and binoculars (or a long-lensed camera, as some of you prefer). It's both contemplative and thrilling, blowing the mind and feeding the soul. What else so instantly and enjoyably gets you outside of yourself and your routine?

You and I, all of us are birders — whether for whatever's in our bins or scope right this minute, or for deeper dives into everything there is to know about species, plumages, songs and habitats. Our pastime encompasses it all, regardless of your aptitude, level of passion and available time. I love how easy Denver Field Ornithologists field trips make it for new birders to get started and to build skills at their own pace.

Spring also signals DFO's annual election, which shuffles our volunteer club leadership a bit with new faces and fresh ideas as new help steps up and some veterans step back. (See this year's candidates on page 13.) After two years as DFO president, I'm one of the step-backs, though I'll remain active as past president, a trip leader and all-purpose volunteer. In this, my last "From the President" message, I send well-deserved thanks to every volunteer member of every committee and team effort. Allow me a few individual thank-yous to:

- **Mary Cay Burger**, departing board member and longtime Membership chair, whose many accomplishments are detailed in an appreciation on page 6 of this newsletter. DFO would be much poorer, figuratively and literally, without your years of service, past leadership and steady, commonsense wisdom
- **Sue Summers**, who served for years as DFO's sharp, capable treasurer and for a time as Membership chair, too
- **Kathy Holland**, Sue's successor as treasurer, who is transforming DFO's budgeting process
- **Dave Hill**, who after four years at the top (president 2019-21 and immediate past president since) has successfully launched and led DFO's impressive team of Hawk Watch volunteers atop Dinosaur Ridge into our club's most successful community science venture
- **Roger Koester**, board member and Finance chair, for wise counsel and for awakening DFO members to the virtue and power of year-end giving through pre-tax IRA distributions
- **Steve Ryder**, who sparked and invigorated DFO's conservation efforts for two years as Conservation chair and board member

Continued on page 6



Blansett at 2022 Nature's educators program
Patrick O'Driscoll



Blansett and past president Dave Hill
Patrick O'Driscoll



Blansett at DFO board retreat
Patrick O'Driscoll

FROM THE PRESIDENT *cont from page 5*

- **Bill Turner**, who as Programs manager has provided a stellar lineup of speakers for DFO's monthly evening programs
- **David Suddjian**, who as Field Trip chair annually propels our unparalleled (and free) field trip program to new heights with skill, passion and a fabulous company of trip leaders
- Board members **Karen Drozda**, **Tina Jones**, **Mary Geder** and **Cyndy Johnson** and Secretary **Nate Bond**, we're so lucky to have you all!
- **Diane Roberts** and **Mark Amershek**, for moderating DFO's Facebook page, **Peter Stolz** and **Jim Esten** for facilitating many Zoom-based DFO programs, webinars and meetings, and longtime DFO archivist **Kris Haglund**. You are all heroes!

I'll add two more very special thank-yous to:

- **Patrick O'Driscoll**, editor of this newsletter, for transforming *The Lark Bunting* into the best nonprofit newsletter anywhere
- Sharon Tinianow, DFO vice president for the past two years as well as Communications chair and doer of innumerable tasks that needed doing. Her organizational aptitude, clear thinking and leadership will continue to serve DFO well when members elect her in April as our new president

Sharon and Pat, your skill and dedication are as amazing as your friendship.

My final thank-you is to new DFO members for joining us! We hope you'll find belonging to it as fun as we do. It's a companionable place of learning and sharing. Our volunteers work hard to allow everyone to have authentically enjoyable experiences, whether you're the newest birding newbie or a globe-trotting expert — young, old and everyone in between, any and every kind of human being.

As your membership deepens, please consider joining in a wide range of volunteer opportunities. DFO is home to many talented people, and whatever *your* particular skill or expertise, we probably can use it. Don't be shy. Join us, challenge us, teach us. Help expand our idea of what DFO can be.

I WILL see you in the field!

— **Susan Blansett**

Susan Blansett, club president since 2021, has volunteered in numerous roles on committees and as an officer since joining the DFO Board in 2016. She became a field trip leader in 2022. A Golden resident, Susan works for the Colorado Workforce Development Council.

DFO News Notes

Got blurbs on birds? Share with **DFO News Notes**: Colorado birding newswits, eBird milestones, tales from the trail, birding life (and life birds!), etc. Send items, photos and any questions to newsletter editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com.

HELP DFO'S "RAPTORTHON" SQUAD: DONATE TODAY!

For the second year, DFO's volunteer cadre of Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch spotters is competing in a national "[Raptorthon](#)" this spring to benefit local and national efforts to monitor migrating birds of prey. DFO's "Riley & the Mile High Raptors" team seeks your tax-deductible donation of any amount in its quest on April 15 to see the most raptor species (and other species, too) in one 24-hour period. Proceeds are split 50-50 between DFO-led Hawk Watch and its national partner, [Hawk Migration Association of North America](#). For more about the DFO team and to donate to the cause, visit the [team's page](#) on HMANA's website.

Also, it's not too late to join DFO's volunteer raptor-counting effort on Dinosaur Ridge, which will continue to tally migrating hawks, eagles, falcons and vultures through mid-May. "No training necessary — all eyes needed!" says **Janet Peters** of DFO's Hawk Watch Committee. Go to the [Hawk Watch](#) page of the DFO website for details.

MADNESS! NEARLY 1 FIELD TRIP A DAY IN MARCH

What a month for DFO field trips March 2023 was. Field Trip chair **David Suddjian** reports that 29 outings in a dozen Colorado counties logged a combined 118 species on 96 separate checklists. With multiple trips on some days, DFO-led outings took place on 19 different dates. For a rundown on where DFO went and how many birds of each species were observed, [click here](#) for the month's combined eBird trip report.

CATCH FLYCATCHERS MAY 4 IN NEWEST "BIRD BOMB" ID SESSION

Year 2 of DFO's popular BIRD BOMBS series of mini-webinars on bird identification begins **Thursday, May 4, 7 p.m. MDT**

with "**It's a Flycatcher**," focusing on ID'ing the flycatcher species that make their spring-summer homes in Colorado. To register for this 7 p.m. MDT Zoom tutorial, [click here](#). And don't forget: The next BIRD BOMB session is "**Spring Swallows**," on **Thursday, April 13, 7 p.m. MDT**. It's about the swallow species that nest here in Colorado. [Click here](#) to register.



Cordilleran Flycatcher
Patrick O'Driscoll

GRASSLANDS BIRD SURVEY IN SEDALIA SEEKS VOLUNTEERS

A study of grassland birds in [Daniels Park](#) in Sedalia seeks volunteer birders to help identify species and count birds during a three-week period in May and June. The park is a preserve of scrub oak-covered prairie that connects to 12,000 acres of open space. Until now, Daniels Park has been managed for its herd of American Bison, which was started when Denver's well-known Genesee Park herd grew too large. Teams of volunteers experienced in grassland bird ID will work in twos, with one observer and one recorder.

The study, in conjunction with Denver Mountain Parks and the Denver Zoo, seeks birders willing to work 1-2 weekday mornings a week (6-10 a.m.) during the May 22-June 9 study period, said **Jennifer Redmond**, a project representative.

Continued on page 8

Familiarity with more than a dozen grassland species is desired, among them Say's Phoebe, Horned Lark, Tree Swallow, House Wren, Western Bluebird, Brown-headed Cowbird, Lesser Goldfinch, and five kinds of sparrows (Chipping, Lark, Vesper, Song and Spotted Towhee).

Redmond said volunteer trailing will be in early May, including safety training for working near bison. The project's two dozen survey points are in the park's southwest and southeast pastures, which are not open to the public. If you're interested in participating, contact Redmond at redmonjs@miamioh.edu. If you have questions you can also phone her at 303-250-3180.



COLORADO'S NEW FISHERS PEAK STATE PARK EXPANDS TRAIL NETWORK

In a recent posting on the CoBirds list-serv, longtime DFO member **Chuck Hundertmark** reported that the new [Fishers Peak State Park](#) near Trinidad has added "a wealth of new hiking options" beyond what was its only path open to the public, the steep, 1.5-mile Challenge Trail. Hundertmark wrote that on a visit the last week of March, he found an offshoot from that trail via "a new wooden bridge over a side drainage with a sign marking the Lower Lone Cub Trail." That route adds a 2.3-mile alternate way to the top of the Challenge, where a new bicycle-only route, the Poison Trail, leads downhill.

He later learned that a new Goldenrod Trail from the top of Challenge Trail "offers a long hike back to the lower part" of Challenge. "While these trails are all in predominantly pinyon-juniper woodland, they now offer varied loop hike options for birders who like a good hike along with their birding." For Parks & Wildlife's webpage about Fishers Peak's new trails, [click here](#).



IN MAY, COLORADO AND WORLDWIDE "BIG DAYS" FOR BIRDING

This year, two annual "big day" events at the mid-May height of spring migration fall just a week apart: the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's [Global Big Day](#) observance on **May 13**, and Colorado Field Ornithologists' [Colorado Birding Challenge](#) "big day" on **May 20**. The global event aims to virtually link many thousands of participants to go birding and share what they find with eBird. Last year's observance drew more than 51,000 people from 201 countries into the field, where they submitted 132,000 checklists with eBird, setting new world records for a single day of birding. The global day also aims to bring new birders into the fold with easy instructions on opening free eBird accounts and posting checklists to the online database.

The Colorado challenge adds an element of fundraising for worthwhile bird-related conservation in our state. (Since its start in 2021, the challenge has raised more than \$75,000.) This year's focus is on Pinyon Jay conservation, with donations going to support surveying and mapping of breeding colony locations in the Southern Rocky Mountains ecoregion of Colorado for protection by land conservation. Another aim is to generate and record eBird data for all 64 Colorado counties on the same day. [Click here](#) for details on how to join the Colorado Birding Challenge and to donate or pledge support. [Click here](#) for more about the Global Big Day.

Continued on page 9

DENVER AUDUBON “VINTAGE” BOOK/ART SALE IN LATE APRIL

On the last weekend of April, Denver Audubon will hold a Vintage Book and Art Sale at its Chatfield nature center at Saturday and Sunday, April 28-29, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. both days. “This is the perfect opportunity for book and art enthusiasts to browse our impressive selection of unique and rare pieces,” said longtime Audubon, DFO and CFO member and Colorado birding authority **Hugh Kingery**. “Simply stop by and peruse our collection at your leisure.” The Denver Audubon Nature Center at Chatfield is at 11280 Waterton Road in Littleton.

LAND BOARD VOTES TO SELL AIKEN CANYON . . . BUT NOT SOON

In transactions aimed to protect military training, testing and operations areas in Colorado from encroachment by future development nearby, the State Land Board has voted to sell several of its southern Front Range and Plains holdings. The purchases by conservation-minded buyers would be bankrolled by the Pentagon’s Readiness and Environmental Protections Integrative Program (REPI for short) to proactively buffer military sites from development that could hinder their missions.

For Fort Carson south of Colorado Springs, one such property is [Aiken Canyon Preserve](#), with 1,060 acres of foothills landscape owned by the land board but managed under lease by The Nature Conservancy (TNC). The preserve, which the conservancy calls “a place where birds and wildflowers abound,” lies across Highway 115 from the Army post’s boundary. Since 2012, birders have recorded 162 species there on about 840 eBird checklists.

The land board vote in January did not set a sale date beyond sometime within a decade, likely no sooner than 3-4 years. The plan is to transfer the lands to TNC and the Trust for Public Land. With restrictions in place to prevent future development beyond their status as a preserve, the sale lands would be connected to an additional 541 acres owned by TNC, and likely another 554 acres owned by El Pomar Foundation, turning it into a 2,100-acre site, perhaps with a visitor center. Another potential option under consideration could be to sell the land to Colorado Parks & Wildlife.



Michael Baum

PROGRAM PREVIEW



Leah Crenshaw and meadowlark
on Pawnee Grasslands
Kyra Johnson



Olivia Taylor with
Mountain Chickadee
William Anderson

Birdsong and Habitats: Updates from DFO-funded Avian Research

Leah Crenshaw, Olivia Taylor
Monday, April 24
7 p.m. MST via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

The final installment in the winter-spring series of DFO monthly Zoom webinar programs (co-sponsored by Denver Public Library) will be a kind of show-and-tell session with recipients of grants in 2022 from the Denver Field Ornithologists' [Research, Education and Conservation Fund](#).

At least two of the six recipients of grants in 2022 will present updates on their research at this program. All grant winners agree to report back to the DFO membership in one of three ways: An article in *The Lark Bunting* newsletter, a DFO field trip planned around the theme and field location of the research, or an oral presentation at the April membership meeting, usually an evening gathering via webinar.

In this case, two of those who will present on April 24 are studying and analyzing birdsong in Colorado, but in different birds in very different habitats: Western Meadowlarks in the Pawnee National Grasslands, and chickadees in canyons above Boulder.

The grasslands researcher is **Leah Crenshaw**, a master's thesis student in the School of Biological Sciences at the University of Northern Colorado in Greeley. She is analyzing grassland birdsong to determine the effect human landscape development has on birds' breeding success. Other previous studies have shown the effect on avian abundance and diversity. But in her [grant application narrative](#), Crenshaw said "a notable research gap exists" in determining what effect landscape changes may have on birds' individual behaviors and fitness. Her research is

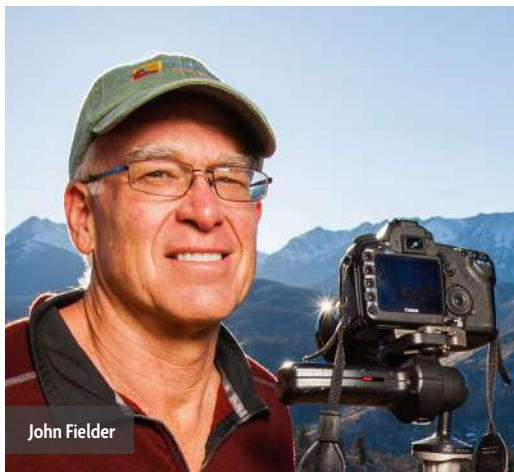
against the backdrop that three-quarters of North American grassland bird species in decline.

Her DFO-funded work seeks to provide new insights into what forces underpin population changes in grassland birds so as to improve conservation of those in Colorado. Crenshaw also aims to offer land managers "data useful to promoting diversity and abundance on their properties."

The other birdsong research presenter is **Olivia Taylor**, a student in the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at the University of Colorado, Boulder. Her focus is on measuring the effects of geographic isolation on differences in song between populations of Black-capped Chickadees as a way to understand further how isolation influences birdsong evolution.

In her [grant application narrative](#), Taylor noted the critical importance of birdsong for recognition within species, defense of territories and mating. "Much like human language, bird song is learned at a young age through exposure to parents or other neighboring adults," she wrote. She aims to explore the effects of canyons as "isolating mechanisms that drive song evolution." Her hypothesis: With lack of exposure to outside individual birds and less "cultural flow," the songs of populations isolated by canyons "will diverge," and divergence will increase with distance between those populations.

[Click here to register](#) for this free April 24 webinar. You'll receive a link and subsequent reminders to connect to the grant recipients' program as the date nears.



FALL PROGRAM SNEAK PEEK

Retrospective: Changing Colorado Landscapes, 1973-2023

John Fielder
Monday, August 28
7 p.m. MST via Zoom

As DFO heads into Colorado's busiest birding season, we take our traditional summer break from monthly evening programs after April's presentation and the annual DFO election. But already on the horizon for our autumn program series is a special evening with famed Colorado landscape photographer **John Fielder**.

Mark your calendar now for "Retrospective: Changing Colorado Landscapes, 1973-2023" on **Monday, Aug. 28, 7 p.m. via Zoom**. Fielder's slide show with commentary, photographs and music will celebrate 50 years of exploring and photographing the state. Fielder plans to discuss "the physical changes in the Colorado landscape and patterns of its use by people, including good and bad, in our effort to protect the state's remaining ecosystems."

Fielder's exquisite wilderness images and landscapes need no introduction. They are so thoroughly identified with Colorado that it's even his "brand" in books and calendars, fine art prints, photography workshops and online: [John Fielder's Colorado](#). The presence and visibility of his works have made Fielder an important player for decades on the Colorado nature scene.

He was also in the news recently with the announcement that he will donate his photographic life's work to [History Colorado](#), official caretaker agency for the state's collective historical memory. Fielder's living bequest includes more than 7,500 photos ("distilled from 200,000 made since 1973"), "important artifacts" (photography equipment, books, papers and "oral histories about life on the wilderness trail") and other "photography paraphernalia." History Colorado will make the images available online this spring for "free digital searches, for personal and commercial use by the general public," and it will host ongoing exhibitions of Fielder's work beginning this summer.

Look for more details, including a registration link for Fielder's free presentation, in an upcoming issue of *The Lark Bunting*.



Muleshoe Bend,
Dolores River Canyon WSA
John Fielder

Time to vote! Here are 2023's DFO officer and board candidates for April election

Patrick O'Driscoll

The polls are open, and it's time to vote for new officers and board members for Denver Field Ornithologists. A couple of days after this issue of *The Lark Bunting* goes live on the DFO website near the end of the first week of April, DFO will email ballots and instructions to all dues-paying members in good standing.

As in the past three years, Denver Field Ornithologists members will vote online via an app that will record your votes. The deadline to return your ballot is **Friday, April 21, at 6 p.m. MDT**. DFO will announce the results via email to all members that weekend as well as on DFO social media. We will also report the results in the next issue of *The Lark Bunting* in May. (NOTE: If you are a member in good standing and have not received the DFO ballot email by the end of the second week of April, please contact DFO Nominating chair **Mary Geder** at mfg5000@live.com or DFO President **Susan Blansett** at susanblansett@gmail.com.)

As outlined in last month's newsletter, members vote for four officers (president, vice president, secretary and treasurer), each of whom serves a 1-year term and can run for re-election; and we vote for several members of the DFO Board of Directors (all serve staggered 3-year terms and can run for the board again).

This year's candidates include three of the four present DFO officers:

- Vice President **Sharon Tinianow**, running for president. In April, Blansett completes two years as president and will remain on the executive committee and board of directors as immediate past president
- Secretary **Nate Bond**, who was appointed interim secretary by the DFO Board in 2022 and who will now stand for election for the first time
- Treasurer **Kathy Holland**, appointed in late 2021 and elected last year

There is no candidate for the position of vice president, which will remain vacant until someone seeks the position. If a candidate comes forward in the coming months, the DFO Board can provisionally appoint someone as interim/acting vice president until the next election in April 2024.

Also on the ballot are five candidates for director seats on the DFO Board, which are for 3-year terms:

- **Cyndy Johnson**, appointed an interim board member earlier this year by the board and also chair of DFO's Membership Committee
- **Roger Koester**, board member since 2020 and chair of the DFO Finance Committee
- **Janet Peters**, chair of the DFO Hawk Watch Committee and a first-time board candidate
- **Courtney Rella**, a DFO member, first-time board candidate and a volunteer elsewhere in raptor education, seasonal bird monitoring and wildland restoration programs
- **Bill Turner**, longtime board member and DFO manager of monthly programs

Continued on page 13

CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENT

Sharon Tinianow

Current vice president and acting chair of the Communications & Outreach Committee, Tinianow was previously editor of *The Lark Bunting*. She also serves on the Conservation Committee. Among numerous projects, she led task forces to revise DFO's Policies & Procedures manual and to create a new club logo. Tinianow began birding when she took an ornithology course as an undergrad at Kent State University in Ohio. She moved to Denver in 2012 and is now retired from the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History. Sharon lives in Denver.



Sharon Tinianow

CANDIDATE FOR SECRETARY

Nate Bond

Appointed interim secretary at the DFO Board's meeting in April 2022, Bond is standing for election for the first time. A high school chemistry teacher and Denver resident, Nate grew up in Lincoln, NE. He came to Colorado after graduation from Iowa State University in 2010. He took up birding in the early days of the COVID-19 outbreak after his wife bought him a pair of binoculars. Soon he was birding at nearby Bear Creek Park, where he first heard of DFO from another birder while chasing a rare shorebird. Nate joined DFO in 2021 and has since become a DFO field trip leader.



Nate Bond

CANDIDATE FOR TREASURER

Kathy Holland

A DFO member since she retired in 2017, Holland became interim club treasurer in November 2021 and was first elected in 2022. Before retirement, she worked in natural gas marketing and risk analysis, but she also did payroll and kept the books for two restaurants her husband operated for a decade. At age 8, Kathy moved with her family from California to Littleton. More recently, after 14 years in New Mexico, she returned to the Denver area about seven years ago. Kathy lives in Centennial.



Kathy Holland

CANDIDATES FOR BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Cyndy Johnson

A longtime member of DFO, Johnson retired in 2020 after nearly 40 years in information technology. She is a 15-year volunteer veteran of waterfowl counts and Breeding Bird Atlas surveys at South Platte Park, and she previously volunteered for years with Hawk Watch on Dinosaur Ridge (now managed by DFO). A Morrison area resident, Cyndy took up both birding and scuba diving about 35 years ago. She seeks out birds on diving trips across the Americas, Caribbean, West Indies and Pacific.



Cyndy Johnson

Continued on page 14

Roger Koester

A DFO member for five years, Koester is chair of the club's Finance Committee and a member of the Conservation Committee. Until retirement, he worked in student financial aid for several universities, and he was active in national, state and regional professional associations, where he served as a president, board member and finance chair. He also has contributed conservation and finance-related articles to *The Lark Bunting*.



Roger Koester

Janet Peters

Peters began birding about five years ago after retiring from engineering in the energy field. Her career and humanitarian work took her to many remote parts of the Americas, from the Amazon jungle to near the Arctic Circle. In 2022, two years after she was inspired into action by Hawk Watch organizer and DFO past president **Dave Hill**, Janet joined the club's Hawk Watch Committee. Recognizing this effort's importance in raptor conservation, she now chairs the committee. A Detroit native and University of Michigan grad, she lived in the San Francisco Bay Area before moving to Littleton in 1986. Mother of three and grandmother of two, Janet is an outdoor enthusiast (cycling, hiking, skiing) and is passionate about protecting the planet.



Janet Peters

Courtney Rella

Rella's passion for birding was sparked in late 2019, when she found several vultures perched on the roof of her new home in New Jersey. A few months later, when the COVID-19 shutdown kicked in, backyard birding became an enchanting hobby. In late 2021, Courtney moved to Colorado and, on a recommendation from birders at Barr Lake State Park, immediately joined DFO. She works full time managing biological safety for a medical device company. When not at work or birding, Courtney volunteers for raptor education, wildland restoration, and seasonal bird monitoring, including Bald Eagle Watch and Hawk Watch. She has also assisted Colorado Parks & Wildlife in collecting reports of birds sick or dead of avian flu. Sharing her love for wildlife conservation will be Courtney's goal as a DFO board member.



Courtney Rella

Bill Turner

A birder for nearly 50 years, Turner is DFO's program manager, responsible for recruiting and presenting speakers at our monthly evening programs on Zoom in the winter, spring and autumn seasons. He worked at the Denver Zoo for 21 years, most of it as head of the education department. A longtime DFO member, he began to volunteer for the club in 2017, when he first joined the board. Bill has birded on six continents and organized numerous guided birding tours abroad. "One of the satisfactions of my volunteering as a board member and monthly program manager is interacting with fellow DFO members and our monthly speakers," Turner adds.



Bill Turner

Continuing board members not yet up for re-election include **Karen Drozda**, **Patrick O'Driscoll**, **Elaine Wagner** (terms expiring in 2024), **Tina Jones** and **Mary Geder** (2025).

In addition, two other board members, **Steve Ryder** and **Dave Hill**, have decided not to seek re-election to the board this term. We thank them both for their service.

DFO PEOPLE

One for the books: Thanks to longtime membership guru Mary Cay Burger



Mary Cay Burger
Patrick O'Driscoll



With Karen Drozda in DFO
booth at Barr Lake SP in 2020



With husband Tom
on CPO outing in 2017

Patrick O'Driscoll

By a fortunate mix of volunteer effort and the rising popularity of birding, Denver Field Ornithologists has seen steady membership growth the first two decades of this century. And whenever someone new to DFO would ask, "So, how many members do we have now?" — the inevitable reply used to be: "Ask Mary Cay. She knows."

That's because after nearly three decades of DFO service, **Mary Cay Burger** has quietly retired as a DFO Board member. It was only one of many volunteer roles she performed since joining DFO in the mid-1990s. Perhaps the most defining of those was as Membership Committee chair, a post she held from 2008 until last year.

If you ever forgot to renew, or moved away, or just let your DFO membership lapse at year's end, you'd soon be hearing from Burger. "We were around 400 members when **Jeane and Glenn Hageman** handed it over," says Mary Cay, remembering DFO's wife-and-husband secretary and treasurer team, who did those jobs plus membership for two decades. *(For the record, DFO was at 619 members in early April after setting a new high of 690 in 2022, but the 2023 count will rise as renewals continue to trickle in.)*

The Hagemans "were so good — they phoned every member that didn't renew, to encourage them to stay with it," Burger adds. "So I felt like I had to do that, too. It was kind of a chore for two months of the year." But she downplays her own role as nothing special, just keeping track: "I wasn't so much a membership promoter as I was just trying to get people to renew. The field trips and the speakers really did the new-member advertising for us."

Burger herself had joined DFO in 1995, about a decade after first going to Tuesday Birders, metro Denver's long-running weekly meet-up group. A Nebraska native (Scottsbluff) and now-retired pharmacist, she had taken up birding casually after seeing "this brilliant red bird in the north woods on Minnesota," where she and her husband, **Tom Burger**, started out together after meeting as students at the University of Nebraska. (After buying a bird guide, she learned her "spark" bird was a Scarlet Tanager.) After several moves, the Burgers and their three children came to Colorado in 1981.

With DFO, she began leading field trips to destinations from Cherry Creek State Park and Rueter-Hess Reservoir to Pawnee National Grasslands and Rocky Mountain National Park. Her volunteering moved into organizational business in 2001 when she joined the DFO Board. By 2005, Mary Cay was drafted to be vice president. Two years later, she was elected DFO president (2007-09). Halfway through that service, in May 2008, she also took on membership. She figured that after finishing as president, "well, I'll just stick around and be membership."

Until club business was fully computerized, Mary Cay kept the DFO rolls in "a long file, like a recipe box, full of 4-by-6 cards" for each member. "When we went to computer, we went through the cards and transferred all the information."

Continued on page 16



By then, she had taken on “meet-and-greet” duty at the door to DFO’s monthly program meetings. In the years before the COVID-19 pandemic led the club to shift evening programs online via Zoom, most in-person gatherings were in the Ricketson Auditorium at the Denver Museum of Nature & Science. “I miss those monthly meetings,” she says. “You lose track of people and miss seeing them.”

That duty led to another visible DFO role: Keeper of a giveaway library of bird books donated by members who were downsizing, retiring or moving away. She says the practice had begun when longtime member **Ed Holub Jr.** ran the DFO “bookstore,” selling a few books and DFO patches at the door. For years, he had also brought bird books and magazines to give away.

“People who were clearing out their libraries would bring books to the meetings and say, ‘Here, let anybody have ‘em,’ ” Mary Cay remembers. Eventually, “Ed grew tired of hauling books,” so she took on that task as well. “We put a donation box out, to put in a buck or so for the grants fund.”

She found a way to move more volumes in yet another membership function: Representing DFO at bird-related events, especially the annual Fall Birding Festival at Barr Lake SP the Saturday after Labor Day. Visitors to her info booth came away

with DFO brochures tucked into their pick of the books.

“Over the years I’ve probably done just about job there is except for money,” she says. “I never touched the DFO money because I’m not a good accountant.” (Well, nobody’s perfect!)

Although her club volunteer days are done, Mary Cay, 76, remains a DFO member and remains busy. She’s still a Tuesday Birders regular, and she has marked 20 years of volunteering in the winter raptor counts at Cherry Creek State Park, where she participated in her first Christmas Bird Count in 1994.

She led her last DFO field trip in 2021: “It was a thrill to go out birding with people to find new stuff. I love when a beginner gets going on trips with me . . . so eager. But lately my hearing and eyes are not as great as they used to be. I would try to get some really good birder with good ears and eyes to lead with me. But it’s been a fun run. The Tuesday Birders are more my speed now.”

We’ll leave the last word about Burger’s club involvement to the following standout sentence from the presentation tribute in 2017 when she received DFO’s highest honor, the [Ptarmigan Award](#):

“Admiring DFO members say, ‘When there is a job to be done, Mary Cay raises her hand.’ ”

BIRD BOMBS away?

One year in, look out:

More will drop in 2023!

*EDITOR'S NOTE: April marks the one-year anniversary of BIRD BOMBS, a monthly DFO program on Zoom in which DFO Field Trip chair **David Suddjian** delivers short, concentrated blasts of bird identification tips to help participants become better birders. In this Q&A, he reflects on how BIRD BOMBS came to be and what goes into them.*



THE LARK BUNTING:

It's been a year now since your first BIRD BOMB. Will there be more?

DAVID SUDDJIAN:

I'll have completed 15 episodes before our first anniversary April 24, and the Zoom videos are all available for viewing on the DFO website's [BIRD BOMBS page](#). These mini-webinars address the basic things ardent birders need to know to better identify and enjoy the birds we love. But 15 topics is just a start. I'm planning for more BIRD BOMBS at least through the end of 2023. Next up after "[Spring Swallows](#)" drops on April 13 are spring sessions on identifying flycatchers and prairie sparrows, as well as a primer on feather molt.

I'm delighted that these episodes so far have helped lots of birders, and I'm grateful to the photographers who have contributed their bird images to bring our ID lessons alive. In addition, a wonderful synergy is developing between BIRD BOMBS and DFO field trips. Many participants view the recordings, even multiple times, and then use in the field what they have learned.

How did the idea for BIRD BOMBS come about?

When I lead field trips, I'm always looking for opportunities to help birders learn more. I like to talk in the field about what we're looking at. During the in-person isolation of the Covid pandemic shutdown,

the idea of virtual presentations really took hold, with new ways to connect with other birders and share what we know.

At the same time, I've found across more than 300 field trips that birders are hungry for more about bird ID. I thought a series of short webinars — no more than 40 minutes each, less than typical birding presentations — could feed that hunger. I envisioned short bursts on seasonal topics as the birding year unfolds, enlivened with PowerPoint slideshows of photos by local birders and other friends. BIRD BOMBS emphasize Colorado-specific topics and species, particularly here in metro Denver and the Front Range, where most of our members and field trip participants live.

Having the Zoom videos available soon afterwards on our website not only serves anyone who missed the live show, it also builds a library of bird ID refreshers that anyone else can refer to whenever they want or need.

Why that name, BIRD BOMBS?

My first stab at it was something like "Colorado Birding Basics," but I knew it had to be catchier, more playful and creative. Actually, my wife **Susan** suggested it, and I loved the name immediately. Deep but fun, and punchy, too. Plus, when you think about it, each episode is exactly that: A bird ID "bomb" that explodes with information. These presentations can be a bit like drinking from a firehose. I deliver the info fast and nonstop, and load my delivery with bits of humor and fun that you might catch (or not) during the live show. That's where our video archive comes in. You can go back and view and review at your own pace, any time. And whether you crack up "live," or later while re-viewing, that's great! Because I'm having fun, too.

How do you decide which episodes come when?

It's all about the birding calendar. I consider the month, and which birds are doing what around here at that time. Each BIRD BOMB focuses on species, bird families and features that you may be looking for in the field when we do the Zoom show and in the weeks beyond. For instance, our next episode, [Spring Swallows](#), lands just as all six of Colorado's swallow species are returning in spring. Regardless of timing, all the topics are of perennial interest to birders, though I do pick subjects I am excited about.

What goes into preparing and presenting each BIRD BOMB?

I work on only one episode at a time. Each takes about two weeks to prepare, but the topic is always on my mind. First I lay out the general flow of what slides I'll need to deliver an info-packed half hour or so. That becomes the bones of the PowerPoint. Then I seek out and compile photos from my list of contributors (many of them locals and DFO members) who have given me permission to use their wonderful work.

Continued on page 18

APPRECIATION

Envelope, please? And The Birdie goes to . . .

Little Wing*

If you watched the Oscars this year, you noticed the glaring omission that I did, right? It happens every year: Thirty different award categories — but what about “Best Bird-focused Short Subject (Series)”?

Well, I've got the envelope right here: (*Rrrrip!*) . . . But of course! The winner is the one by which all other nominees must be measured: **BIRD BOMBS!** Permit me to honor its star, screenwriter, producer and director, DFO's own **David Suddjian**, with the following highlight reel:

- **Suitable for all audiences:** Although aimed at “developing birders” (aren't we all?), BIRD BOMBS include species reviews, tips and helpful information for intermediate and advanced birders, too. Case in point: last December's “[First State Record!](#)” episode
- **Sneak preview:** Nearly every episode provides just-in-time delivery of essential bird ID information for your next outing or field trip. So if you haven't yet, register NOW for the April 13 episode, “[Spring Swallows](#)”
- **Picture show:** Great photographs, most of them by Colorado birders, beautifully illustrate David's points. For a great example with many, many photos, check out last February's episode, “[Where's That on the Bird?](#)”
- **Cast:** BIRD BOMBS' billing of Colorado birds is drop-dead gorgeous, with a special focus on those along the Front Range. So hard to choose the best, but take your pick: Maybe last month's “[Colorado Blues](#)” . . . perhaps January's “[Mountain Finches](#)” . . . even last July's “[Summer Hummers](#)”
- **Animation:** Try last October's “[Looking at Loons](#),” starting at 2 minutes, 15 seconds in. Is there any sequence more lovely?
- **Screenplay:** *Wordplay*, that is — quips, puns, humor! “Mountain Finch Time,” anyone? And do scrums of Northern Shovelers *really* paddle around counterclockwise in the Northern Hemisphere? BIRD BOMBS are a blast
- **Makeup and Hairstyling:** Clearly, honors go to the female Hooded Merganser in last December's episode, “[Better Duck](#)”

Ready to rewind? You can walk the red carpet to these and all past episodes on the [BIRD BOMBS archive](#) page of the DFO website. No tux or designer gown necessary!

* “**Little Wing**” is the nom de plume of a BIRD BOMBS buff and DFO member who has seen all 14 episodes to date, some of them several times.



BIRD BOMBS *cont from page 17*

I'm not always after the prettiest bird portraits or the highest quality images. I also want to show what we so often encounter in the field, with its challenges of difficult lighting, obscured views and long distances, all of which make bird ID harder. For recent episodes, I've had to compile and sort through hundreds of images for the ones that work best. I also use eBird and other aids to prepare maps and graphs that help show occurrence patterns for each species.

With so many available images and points I could make about this ID or that, the biggest challenge is always to stay focused on one fact: It's a single “bomb,” not a full-scale air raid. With a 40-minute limit for most sessions, prep time is everything. It's harder to be brief and still deliver the depth of information I want to share.

Once I've decided on the identification points I want to highlight, I pick the final images and put everything together. Inevitably, I'll fiddle with the final product even in the final hour before my Zoom showtime, so each BIRD BOMB is freshly made.

Sounds like a lot of work — is there fun, too?

My favorite part is finding fun ways to present each episode: What themes to play with? How to compare species? Different ages and sexes? Seasonal changes? In the end, my aim is to celebrate birds in a beautiful way, with the help of great photographers and a lot of preparation.

And I'm learning as I go. I've given many live talks in meeting rooms and auditoriums over the years, but BIRD BOMBS are my first virtual presentations. Once the “show” begins, I'm out there on my own unless there's a technical glitch that our Zoom mavens can fix. I've been known to leave an uncaught typo or two on my slides, and I'm sure I say things that aren't true, sometimes unintentionally.

So when I reach the end of my presentation (*Whew!*) and stop screen-sharing, suddenly I'm not “alone” anymore — because **Laura Steadman** is now there, helping to monitor and present any questions from our Zoom audience. And after that? One click of the mouse and I'm by myself in my office again. Usually, I'm smiling inside that some bit of birding beauty in that episode may have made birders out there smile, too.

Up, down, up again?

The uncertain saga of the Greater Sage-Grouse

Patrick O'Driscoll

When it comes to kicking a football, tragicomic *Peanuts* hero **Charlie Brown** never gets a break when the holder is nemesis **Lucy**, always yanking it away at the last second.

When it comes to kicking a *political* football, the Greater Sage-Grouse hardly gets a break, either. More than once, presidents and government agencies have yanked habitat protections out from under these iconic birds of the interior West (which are, coincidentally, about the size of footballs). Will the politicians do so again?

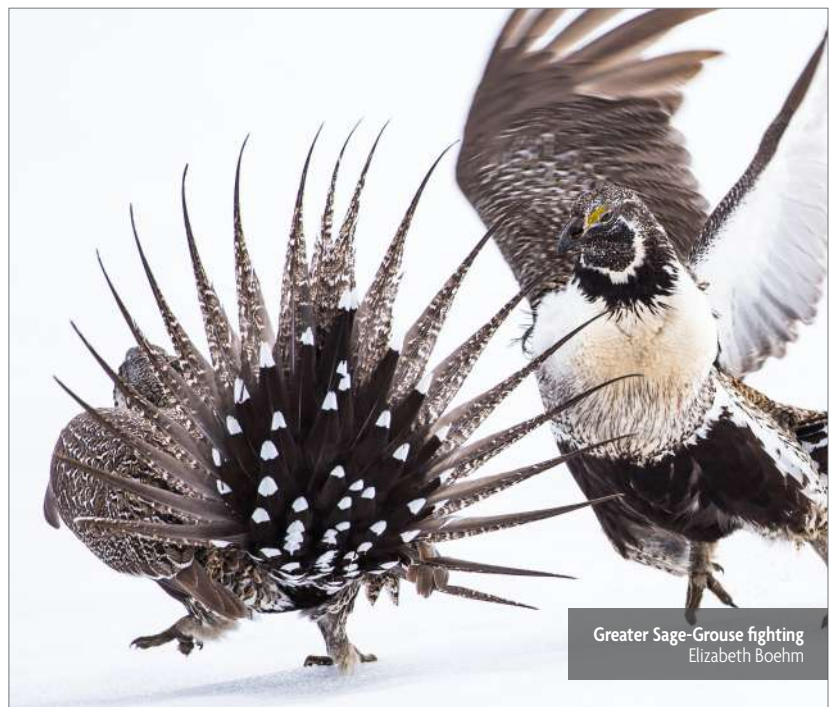
Audubon Rockies' point person on that question sought to put an optimistic spin on the bird's plight at DFO's monthly program Feb. 27. **Daly Edmunds**, director of policy outreach for Audubon's Colorado-Utah-Wyoming region, titled her hour-long talk "Greater Sage-Grouse: Largest Conservation Effort in U.S. History." But in her telling of the saga to an audience of about 95 Zoom attendees, the years-long, science-based effort to conserve and protect the birds hasn't mattered much yet. Across several presidential administrations, politics has interfered.

"The science has been pretty clear there are a lot of threats to this bird," Edmunds said at one point. "The species is not doing well." To say the least. She displayed a U.S. Geological Survey fever chart that shows sage-grouse numbers plummeting 80 percent since the 1960s. The graph looks like a saw-toothed mountain ridge, tapering jaggedly down from its 1965 peak toward a 2020 low near the valley floor.

The outlook beyond is bleak, too. In the next half-century plus, Edmunds said, more than three-quarters of grouse mating grounds, or leks, face a greater than 50 percent chance of being "extirpated" — sci-speak for destroyed. "We used to joke around that if there were ever an opera that featured a wildlife species, it would be the Greater Sage-Grouse because of the ups and downs that have come around this bird," she added.

After a familiar introduction/lesson about the species, its place in the West, and minutiae about the players, Edmunds addressed what imperils the Greater Sage-Grouse most: Destructive wildfires across the Intermountain West's vast-but-shrinking "sagebrush sea" (1.3 million acres lost annually), and a relentless push to drill for oil and gas beneath the bird's fragile high-desert habitat.

The brushfires are fueled by cheatgrass and five other weedy invasives, torching sagebrush steppes every 5-10 years where they had once burned only twice a century. (During Q&A, Edmunds said a U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service social media post compared cheatgrass to the unstoppable ice-zombie army of "White Walkers" in TV's *Game of Thrones* epic.)



Continued on page 20

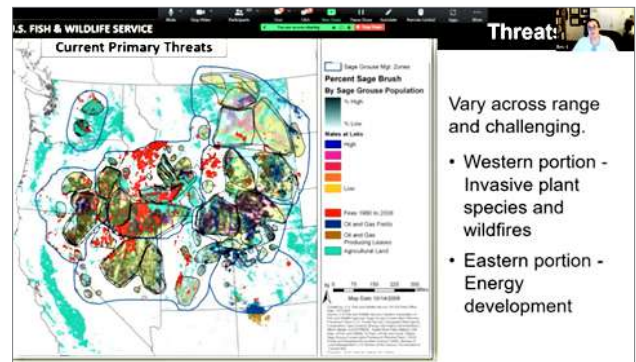
Energy development is abetted by political decisions to sell more drilling leases on federal lands with prime sage-grouse habitat, damaging breeding grounds and disturbing the birds. In Wyoming, vigorous new exploration is on a collision course with the largest grouse population by state (37 percent of the total, more than twice the next closest of 10 other western states).

She noted that Colorado has just 4 percent of the total (14,000 birds), all in the northwest quadrant of the state. But alarmingly, last year's spring count of its Meeker-White River population leks found no birds for the first time.

Edmunds, who leads Audubon's [Sagebrush Ecosystem Initiative](#), said the Greater Sage-Grouse first stirred conservation concern in the 1950s, but the key battles have been waged over the past two decades. After numerous petitions during the Bush administration, efforts to declare the species worthy of Endangered Species Act protection were sidelined. During the Obama administration, protection was found "warranted" but held back by Fish & Wildlife as not high enough in priority to act. Subsequent years of intensive scientific study (2010-15) and court rulings led to an agreement for tough resource management plans that would forestall the need for an endangered-species declaration. But once the Trump administration took over, a 2017 executive order pushed for yet more drilling and shelved those state-by-state plans.

Under the Biden administration, efforts to resurrect and update those strong resource management plans are moving forward again, with new findings and draft plans due as soon as this July. "So that massive effort that we saw from 2010 to 2015, we're starting it again," Edmunds said during Q&A after her presentation. She asked DFO members to join in public comment this summer in support of the resource plans. "It's going to be a tough battle," she said, "but I am optimistic."

Click here to view the complete video of
***Greater Sage-Grouse:
Largest Conservation Effort in U.S. History***
with **Daly Edmunds** in the DFO Past Programs archive



Top: Greater Sage-Grouse decline since 1960's
Bottom: Map colors chart threats to sage-grouse

MARCH PROGRAM REVIEW

Cooper's Hawk program review next month

DFO's March 27 evening program — "How Historical Redlining Led Denver's Cooper's Hawks to Live Where They Do" with Denver raptor biologist **Alyssa Davidge** — fell too close to *The Lark Bunting's* publication deadline to include a written review in this issue. We will publish our review in next month's newsletter.

In the meantime, if you were unable to attend Davidge's presentation live on Zoom, you can view the program recording via this link to the [DFO "Past Programs" webpage](#).



Welcome to new DFO members

Jim and Janet Buntrock of Littleton; Tom Chaney, Lakewood; Judith Cohen, Denver; Aditi Desai, Aurora; Mary DiManna, Thornton; Rosie Downs, Lakewood; Patty Jaacks, Centennial; Nicole Leonard, Boulder; Valerie Martino, Denver; Lisa McGraw, Denver; Kim Morss, Greenwood Village; Jane Nyman, Denver; Carla Richardson, La Veta; Trey Rogers, Denver; John Tarr and Edie Albano, Littleton; Shelley and Charlie Wall, Littleton, and Deborah Zerkowitz, Highlands Ranch

Thank you for your contribution

Research, Education and Conservation Grants Fund

Kevin Corwin, Stephen Dreskin and June Inuzuka, Victoria Miles, Larry Modesitt, Courtney Rella, Carla Richardson, and Tom Whitten

Friends of DFO

Tom Chaney, Kevin Corwin, Victoria Miles, and Larry Modesitt

DFO's Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch

Ann Bonnell and Mary Ann Bonnell, Doug Bridwell and Stacy McVicker, Kevin Corwin, Jane Haddock, Victoria Miles, Larry Modesitt, and Courtney Rella



LAST LOOK, LAST WORD

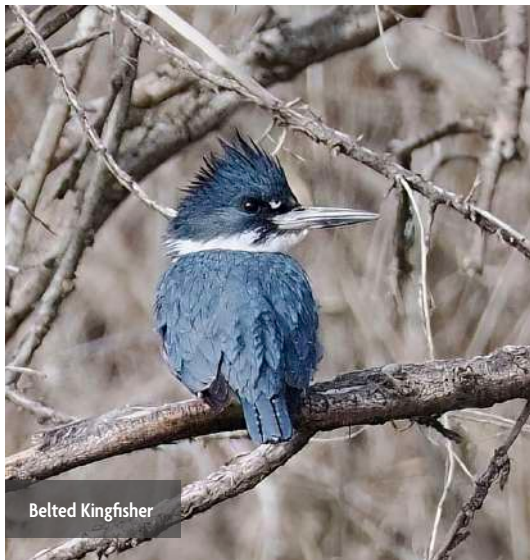
City birds, pretty
birds — even
amidst trucks,
machinery . . .
and razor wire



Top: In a tangle of razor wire
Bottom: DFO birders walk Centennial Park fenceline



Downy Woodpecker



Belted Kingfisher



Common Goldeneye flyby

On a chilly, partly cloudy March 14, a band of DFO field trippers went looking for signs of transition into spring. They found some in Englewood's Centennial Park, a 37-acre lakeside jewel in a very urban setting, tucked between South Federal Boulevard and an industrialized stretch of the South Platte River.

When you bird there, the sounds of trucks and other machinery are part of the landscape, as is the line of giant power transmission towers marching through the neighborhood.

And then there are the coils of razor wire that keep people on the park side of a north-boundary fence that surrounds a huge, private RV storage lot.

But if you're a tired-looking Western Meadowlark, you may find that a perch on such a sharp, even menacing symbol of urban and human insecurity is just a restful spot with peace and security.

Through the lens of sharp-eyed **Melody Serra**, we find that delightful. Enjoy these views.

Melody Serra, a registered nurse at the VA and an outdoor enthusiast, joined DFO in 2022. Living in Alabama in 2021, she discovered the joy of birding, which led to her love of photographing birds, too.



Killdeer



Starlings on wire

Until the next Lark Bunting . . .
GOOD SPRING BIRDING!



Meadowlark amid razor wire
Melody Serra



THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 59 | ISSUE 06 | JUNE 2023

DFOBIRDS.ORG

COLORADO BIRDING

Grouching in Gunnison
Is *Sisk-a-dee*-lightful

PAGE 14

FROM THE (NEW) PRESIDENT

DFO makes room for
the many ways we bird

PAGE 5

LAST WORD, LAST LOOK

Spring migration color from
DFO artist Joe's palette

PAGE 23

DFO NEWS NOTES

Update: Bye-bye birding
as we know it at Chico

PAGE 7

dfo
DENVER FIELD
ORNITHOLOGISTS



Lazuli Bunting
Joe Chen



Joe Chen learned Chinese ink painting in middle school

but didn't take up birding until after college in his native Taiwan. A project design engineer in the computer field, he moved to Denver in 1999 and joined DFO in 2018.

ON THE COVER

Lazuli Bunting: However you say it, heavenly blue under western skies

Let's dispense with that pesky pronunciation business first: How do YOU say the name of the bird on the cover of this month's newsletter?

LAHZ-oo-lye Bunting? Luh-ZOO-lee? LAZZ-oo-lye? LAHZ-oo-lee? You can find pronouncer sound clips online for those and yet other ways to say it if you look hard enough. Me, I'd prefer to see one again, and soon. Such a beauty. eBird says I've seen Lazuli Bunting (*Passerina amoena*) 31 times in the past decade, the most recent late last August in — get this — my own east-central Denver backyard, two doors down from . . . busy East Colfax? A shocker for sure. He must've seen the feeder; there's no brush, weeds, or nearby stream to mimic the semiarid habitat that Lazulis prefer. But of course, in migration anything's possible.

And now we're in the thick of migration once more, so be on the lookout. Wanting some spring color for the newsletter cover after our long, gray winter, we asked DFO member and bird artist extraordinaire **Joe Chen** to paint us a striking seasonal visitor for this issue of *The Lark Bunting*. Joe tells us this was a "lifer" species on his first field trip after joining DFO in 2018: "I was amazed by its vibrant color."

The species is named for [lapis lazuli](#), a semiprecious gemstone prized for its rich blueness. "Lazuli" derives from words for "heavenly" or "sky," a fine description for the dazzling hue displayed by this and all other *Passerina* bunting males. (The Lazuli female, alas, is buffy brown, though thin whitish wingbars set her apart from her other drab bunting sisters.) The species' melodic scientific name, *Passerina amoena*, is Latin for "nice sparrow" or "pleasant sparrow." Although a finch and not a sparrow, the bird IS nice and pleasant on the eyes.

Uncommon east of the Front Range, this western beauty winters in Mexico and summers west of us all the way up into the borderlands of British Columbia. In western Colorado, Lazuli Buntings will breed in brushy surroundings as high up as 10,000 feet, favoring scrubby patches, thickets along streams, even pinyon-juniper woodlands and sagebrush steppes. Fun fact: *Birds of the World* says the males are tireless singers that compose their own breeding-ground songs, mixing syllables and borrowing riffs from others to create new and individual tunes.

The one I saw at my feeders last August exhibited another unique Lazuli characteristic noted in *Birds of the World*: the beginnings of a patchy, "prebasic" molt, with smudges of his rust-orange breast coloration on his blue head and back. Presumably, he was southbound for one of two molting "hotspots" in southern AZ-NM and northern Sonora, MX to finish feather shedding and replacement before continuing on to winter in western Mexico.

Although Lazuli Bunting rates "Species of Least Concern" status nationally, some populations are in serious decline, including in Colorado's Southern Rockies region. One likely reason: Increasing populations of Brown-headed Cowbirds in some areas have severely hammered the buntings' success at fledging young because of the cowbirds' rampant brood-parasite egg-laying in Lazuli nests.

— **Patrick O'Driscoll**, editor



IN THIS ISSUE

- 2 On the Cover**
Lazuli Bunting: However you say it, heavenly blue under western skies
- 5 From the President**
DFO's new birder-in-chief:
How do we love birding? Let us count the ways
- 7 DFO News Notes**
- 10 Monthly Programs**
- 11 DFO News**
Members re-elect and add new DFO leaders in April vote
- 12 Hawk Watch**
Wind-whipped wildfire tests Hawk Watch
- 14 Field Trips**
Sisk-a-dee-lightful: A pre-dawn date with our own Gunnison Sage-Grouse
- 19 Conservation**
Bird flu update: Daunting test for Colorado rehabbers
- 22 Last Look, Last Word**
Brush, stroke, and hue: Spring's colorful palette on the wing . . . and the page

The Lark Bunting newsletter of Denver Field Ornithologists is published online monthly at dfobirds.org except for joint issues in July–August and February–March.

PUBLICATION STAFF

Editor

Patrick O'Driscoll

Assistant Editor

Mike Fernandez

Photo Editor

Jim Esten

Layout and Design

Jennie Dillon

Contributors this issue

Susan Blansett, Jill Boice, Joe Chen, Mike Fernandez, Karen Fox, Kristine Haglund, Linda Hodges, Kathy Holland, Courtney Rella, David Suddjian, Michael Tincher, Sharon Tinianow

CONTRIBUTE TO THE NEWSLETTER

Submit original articles or story ideas to the editor at patodrisk@gmail.com.

Send image-file photos of birds or bird outings to the photo editor at jcesten@gmail.com.

Editors reserve the right to accept and edit suitable articles and photos for publication.

NEWSLETTER ADVERTISING

The Lark Bunting does not accept or contain paid advertising. DFO **AdBIRDtisements** are FREE to club members to seek or sell bird-related equipment, supplies, books and decorative items (artwork, photos, clothing, note cards, etc.).

- Ads must include name, email and/or telephone number, and may include weblink if items offered online
- Ads may be edited for inappropriate content or excessive length (125-word limit); ONE photo or image per ad
- Ads do not carry over each month. To renew, resubmit by next deadline
- Available *only* to DFO members
- Deadline: last day of month except January and June (*The Lark Bunting* does not publish in February and July)

Send AdBIRDtisement materials to editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com.

Next deadline: Wednesday, May 31



**A community of birders,
learning and acting together
for avian wildlife**

Denver Field Ornithologists is an all-volunteer organization that conducts hundreds of free birdwatching field trips throughout the year and welcomes participation and membership by all. DFO promotes enjoyment of nature, the study of birds, and protection of them and their habitats in greater Denver and beyond.

In addition to field trips, evening programs and birding workshops, DFO conducts community science in the field, including the spring Hawk Watch raptor migration count on Dinosaur Ridge.

DFO awards grants annually for bird-related research, education and conservation projects in Colorado. For more information, visit the [Research, Education & Conservation Grants](#) page on the DFO website.

DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and financial contributions to DFO's three giving funds are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

DFO OFFICERS

President

Sharon Tinianow
sharontinianow@gmail.com

Vice President

Vacant

Secretary

Nathan Bond
dfobirds.secretary@gmail.com

Treasurer

Kathy Holland
kcloudview@comcast.net

Past President

Susan Blansett
susan.blansett@gmail.com

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Karen Drozda
drozforte@aol.com

Mary Geder
mfg5000@live.com

Cyndy Johnson
cyndyjohnson28@msn.com

Tina Jones
tjcalliope@hotmail.com

Roger Koester
koester1949@gmail.com

Patrick O'Driscoll
patodrisk@gmail.com

Janet Peters
j.f.peters58@gmail.com

Courtney Rella
dr.cawtney@gmail.com

David Suddjian
dsuddjian@gmail.com

Bill Turner
toursbyturner@aol.com

Elaine Wagner
ewagner1000@yahoo.com

COMMITTEE CHAIRS & ROLES

Better Birding Skills

Sharon Tinianow (acting)
sharontinianow@gmail.com

Communications & Outreach

Vacant

Conservation

Vacant

Field Trips

David Suddjian
davidsuddjian@gmail.com

Finance

Roger Koester
koester1949@gmail.com

Grants

Elaine Wagner
ewagner1000@yahoo.com

Hawk Watch

Janet Peters
j.f.peters58@gmail.com

Membership

Cyndy Johnson
cyndyjohnson28@msn.com

Nominations

Mary Geder
mfg5000@live.com

Programs Director

Bill Turner
toursbyturner@aol.com

Historian

Kristine Haglund
kahaglund1@aol.com

Web Administrator

Jim Esten
admin@dfobirds.org

Zoom Coordinator

Peter Stoltz
dfobirds.zoom@gmail.com

DFO ONLINE

Website

dfobirds.org

Facebook Group

facebook.com/groups/dfobirds

Instagram

instagram.com/denverfieldornithologists

CONTACT

Email

dfocommsgroup@gmail.com

Via website (at bottom of home page)

dfobirds.org

US Mail

Attn: Kathy Holland
Treasurer, DFO
351 E Caley Ave
Centennial, CO 80121-2201

LEARN MORE

Membership — Join or Renew

dfobirds.org/DFO/Membership.aspx

Field Trips — Explore / Sign Up

dfobirds.org/FieldTrips.aspx

Volunteering

dfobirds.org/DFO/Volunteer.aspx

Charitable Giving

dfobirds.org/DFO/Donations.aspx

DFO Merch Store

zazzle.com/store/official_dfo_shop



FROM THE PRESIDENT

DFO's new birder-in-chief: How do we love birding? Let us count the ways

Sharon Tinianow

Hello, DFO! I hope you are enjoying spring birding wherever you are. As I step in as president for our truly remarkable organization, I'm thinking about the ways we are birders, and how we complement one another. There may be nearly as many ways to be a birder as there are birds, but for openers, let's talk today about three.

From time to time, I've birded in the company of people who know not just the number of species on their life list, but also how many they've seen this year AND on the field trip we're on at that very moment. Some plan their travels largely around what birds they can add to their lists. We know them (some of us ARE them) as "listers," right? Very organized and methodical, listers taught me how to use eBird's "explore" feature, an invaluable tool to find good places to see birds whenever I'm away from home.

Other times, I've birded among folks who seem to enjoy the other birders as much as the birds we see. Chatting in the field as birders do, their wide-ranging conversation doesn't stop with the birding information we share. It is obvious they are also forming friendships that reach beyond the birds. Partly by being in the company of "social birders," I have found new friends myself.

Me? I think I belong to a still another broad group — call us "casual birders." I don't keep or update a life list, but I know which birds I have seen, and when I see a new "lifer." I don't chase rarities, either, though if I happen to be in a place where a rare bird has been reported, I'll certainly look for it. Visiting somewhere new, I do not arrive with a "target species" list of what I hope to see. When birder friends from Ohio came to visit us in Denver, we took them birding in the foothills. One of them asked about the target birds for the day. My casual-birder reply: "Whoever shows up."

The great thing about Denver Field Ornithologists is that our club has room for every kind of birder. Life lister, year lister, county lister? Good for you! Social birder at home in

the group? Welcome! Here to learn how to identify more birds? Folks on our trips are there to help. Or, like me, open to whatever presents itself on a birding outing? We'll walk together and help each other take in the many benefits of time spent in nature.



Tinianow at a DFO event
Patrick O'Driscoll

Besides, I'm betting none of us is just one kind of birder or other. I may be casual overall, but I am also a patch birder, visiting south-central Denver's Washington Park at least once a week through the year, *always* with binoculars. Yes, very focused, but enjoying the seasonal progressions of waterfowl and songbirds. I celebrate the spring return of Black-crowned Night-Herons and Snowy Egrets to the island in Grasmere Lake. I look for the Bald Eagle who visits Smith Lake every winter. (It may or may not be the same bird, but it's almost always there sometime each winter.) I listen for the calls of the Say's Phoebe and other songbirds stopping over during migration. Knowing this one place so deeply, enhances my connection to it.

Continued on page 6



DFO field trippers in 2019
Patrick O'Driscoll

FROM THE PRESIDENT *cont from page 5*

And like many, if not most birders I know, I'm birding all the time, wherever I go — including my own backyard. (Sound familiar?) The sight of very common species still delights me as much as a glimpse of a rarity does. I enjoy the chatter of House Finches and the acrobatics of Black-capped Chickadees at the backyard feeders. It's a red-letter day in my book whenever an American Goldfinch shows up. The first time I hear the song of a Spotted Towhee in spring? Why yes, I DO celebrate.

But the rewards of my “casual” birding aren't just the things with feathers. When I'm out birding, nature shows me more: the plants (particularly wildflowers in bloom), the mammals we come across occasionally, the insects that show up. Once while birding, I encountered a woman foraging for boletes, the earthy mushrooms of early summer. Now I look for fungi, too, though I am neither bold enough nor knowledgeable enough to harvest them yet. But on birding trips now, I am often lagging toward the rear because so much else captures my attention.

That includes the scenery. I am awestruck by the Mountain West — the Western Slope's aspen forests, Mesa Verde's dry scrublands, eastern Colorado's prairie grasslands. It's the same in the landscapes outside and beyond our state. Our planet's diversity of life and variety of landforms simply astonish me.

Does all this make me a generalist, maybe a nature nerd? I don't know, but within my first 15 minutes inside any natural area or space, I tend to breathe a deep sigh that says: *I'm home*. Birding in this multifaceted way restores me. And in DFO, I am pleased to find other people who feel the same way.

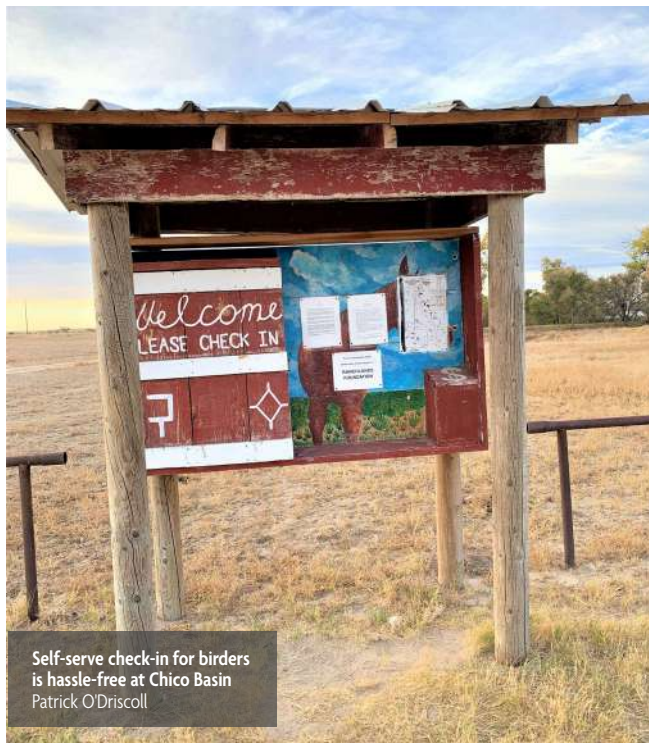
Some years ago, I attended a day-long birding workshop in Ohio that ended with a bird walk. When we returned to the parking lot, the leader said something like, “Could there be anything better than being in this place with all of you, who appreciate its beauty so completely?” That is how I feel at the end of any birding trip, every birding trip.

I wish the same for all of you. So let's get out there. Happy birding, one and all!

Sharon Tinianow, who joined DFO in 2016, was elected club president in April 2023. A former editor of *The Lark Bunting*, she began birding in an ornithology class in college. Sharon retired as assistant director of CU Boulder's Museum of Natural History.

DFO News Notes

Got blurbs on birds? Share with **DFO News Notes**: Colorado birding newsbits, eBird milestones, tales from the trail, birding life (and life birds!), etc. Send items, photos and any questions to newsletter editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com.



UPDATE: BYE-BYE BIRDING AS WE KNOW IT AT CHICO BASIN RANCH

As outlined in our article in the [April issue of *The Lark Bunting*](#), the future of unfettered, go-when-you-like birding at state-owned Chico Basin Ranch in El Paso and Pueblo counties is virtually dead after 2024, given the Colorado State Land Board's hardline stance on access for non-ranching uses. Unsettled, however, is just how onerous the state's new limits on birding will be in 2025 and beyond. The board's staff and representatives of Aiken Audubon, the Colorado Springs chapter of National Audubon, are closer to terms on a restrictive birding lease but are still talking on thorny particulars.

The 86,000-acre ranch is one of Colorado's richest locales for birds (more than 350 species recorded) and a popular DFO field trip destination. For more than two decades, it has been

leased by [Ranchlands](#), an eco-friendly livestock operator whose no-hassle, open-gate policy welcomes birders year-round.

But once that lease expires at the end of 2024, the land board will exert complete control over non-ranch activities. Already, the state is expected to restrict birder access to no more than 10 weeks total a year in overly narrow windows of spring and fall migration, with an unreasonable 20-birder daily quota and an absurd mornings-only time limit before birders must leave the property.

Last month, the [land board website](#) indicated a "request for proposals" (RFP) for prospective ranching lessees (including Ranchlands) was "coming soon." As this issue of *The Lark Bunting* prepared to publish, that RFP was imminent. The board seeks "competitive proposals" for up to five 10-year leases not just for ranching but also "recreation" (including birding) and "hospitality" (guest ranch tourism). It says it will accept bids through July 27. The board has said interested applicants can bid on any and up to "all five lease offerings." That latter option superficially resembles the current single-lessee arrangement with Ranchlands, but the planned constraints on birding are light-years away from current practice.

"I presume we'll have a birding contract before summer," said **Linda Hodges**, conservation chair and negotiator for Aiken Audubon. "But I have no info about what 2025 will look like." Stay tuned for more downbeat updates.

DFO'S FIRST VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION DAY JUNE 4 @ ROCKY MOUNTAIN ARSENAL

Since our organization launched in 1935 as the Colorado Bird Club, Denver Field Ornithologists has been blessed with dedicated volunteers who have kept our enterprise going and growing. In the 88 years since then, much has changed — and our volunteers continue to keep us innovating and improving for our members. So, on the morning of **Sunday, June 4**, DFO will host its first **Volunteer Appreciation Day** at the visitor center of Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge.

The event begins at 8:30 a.m. MDT with DFO member-attendees treated to breakfast snack bags and coffee in the visitor center, with the appreciation program at 9 a.m. After that is a 10 a.m. owl program by [Nature's Educators](#), Colorado's own wildlife education outreach organization, featuring an array of awesome birds.

Continued on page 8

This free event is limited to active DFO members, but you must register. Visit the DFO [Better Birding Workshops page](#) to do so. Come help us celebrate the volunteers (perhaps including YOU?) who make DFO such a tremendous birding organization.

LITTLE SPARROWS ON THE PRAIRIE? BIRD BOMBS AWAY!

DFO's popular BIRD BOMBS series of bird ID mini-webinars via Zoom starts the summer with "Prairie Sparrows" on **Thursday, June 22, at 7 p.m. MDT**. This session will focus on identification of Colorado's grassland sparrow species. [Click here to register](#) for a detail-packed half-hour with BIRD BOMBS creator and DFO Field Trip chair **David Suddjian**, with time for Q&A afterwards.



DFO AWARDS GRANTS TO FIVE FOR SCIENCE, EDUCATION

Five avian research projects ranging from a population study of colonial nesters at Wheat Ridge's Tabor Lake to the effect of habitat quality on Flammulated Owl fitness in Colorado's Pike National Forest have won 2023 grants totaling about \$9,100 from DFO's Research, Education & Conservation Grant Fund. The grantees include three graduate students conducting separate bird-related research at the University of Colorado Boulder, another student researcher from Colorado College in Colorado Springs, and an environmental interpreter from the City of Wheat Ridge.

On recommendation from the club's Grants Committee, the DFO Board voted unanimously in February to approve the grants. The grantees and their affiliations, project titles and grant amounts include:

- **Jack Doneika**, Colorado College, [Estimating the effect of habitat quality on gene flow genetic diversity and fitness in Flammulated Owls](#), \$2,000
- **Susan Bennett**, City of Wheat Ridge, [Tabor Lake Bird Population Study](#), \$1,600
- **Sara Garcia**, University of Colorado Boulder, [Assessing Environmental Heterogeneity Among Barn Swallow Nesting Sites](#), \$2,000
- **Ajay Patel**, CU Boulder, [Exploring the geographic consistency of the genetic basis of spatial cognition in mountain chickadees](#), \$1,500
- **Haley Kenyon**, CU Boulder, [The effects of color pattern differences on between-species aggressive interactions in a Colorado Front Range avian hybrid zone](#), \$1,950

The grants, awarded since 1994, assist Colorado scientists, educators and others with projects in three areas: education in the knowledge of birds, research in ornithology, and conservation of birds and their habitat.

CFO'S MAY 20 BIRDING CHALLENGE BACKS PINYON JAY RESEARCH

There's still time to register your team for a competitive day of birding at the peak of spring migration for an important bird conservation cause. On May 20, the Colorado Field Ornithologists' Colorado Birding Challenge sends out teams of 2-4 birders across numerous Colorado counties to tally the most species in a day. This year's challenge already is underway with an expanded format for participants who can't join in on the official count day because of other commitments. **Chuck Hundertmark**, vice president of CFO, says they can enter as "non-competitive" teams and do their big day of birding on any day in May. And in this case, "team" includes solo birders.

Competitive or not, all participants are asked to solicit donations or per-species pledges of financial support. Beneficiary this year is research to find and protect Pinyon Jay breeding colonies and vital surrounding habitat to identify them as critical for the species long-term survival. The population of this iconic species of the Intermountain West's pinyon-juniper forests has plunged since the mid-1960s, an estimated 85 percent loss.

Continued on page 9



Pinyon Jays
Patrick O'Driscoll

The county-based challenge aims to collect birding data on the same date for as many of or all of Colorado's 64 counties. Since some counties have more bird species than others, CFO has created a handicapping system to set "par" levels for each county that equalize the competition. Visit CFO's [Colorado Birding Challenge webpage](#) for details and registration.

DFO SETS NEW HIGH FOR FIELD TRIPS IN A MONTH

This spring, our club led an April shower of 31 field trips, the most outings ever in a single month. DFO Field Trip chair **David Suddjian** reports that 24 of the month's 30 days had at least one field trip, and some days had 3-4. The eBird monthly statistical report that Suddjian generated for DFO in April shows trip leaders submitted 187 checklists from 15 Colorado counties. Those checklists covered a combined 168 avian species. The February performance topped a previous high of 30 field trips and 162 species last October. "We could have had even more trips, but weather got in the way a few times," Suddjian noted in announcing the new milestone. "Thank you to our fine field leaders who made it possible. Eighteen different DFO leaders led trips in April 2023." [Click here for an eBird trip report](#) with the results of all those April outings.



FRIENDS OF MARILYN RHODES CELEBRATE HER LIFE JUNE 25

Last November, master birder, Audubon field trip leader and DFO member **Marilyn Rhodes** of Evergreen died unexpectedly. Seven months later, Marilyn's friends plan a bird-centered celebration of her life at **Genesee Mountain Park** on **Sunday, June 25**. The tentative schedule begins at 9 a.m. with a bird walk to the top of the mountain, followed at 11 a.m. by a program of speakers, a eulogy and audience reflections and memories. A potluck picnic lunch follows at noon, and music and storytelling will begin at 1 p.m. At the time of her death, Rhodes was active in both Denver and Evergreen Audubon. She described herself on her Twitter page as "Wildlife lover/advocate, environmentalist, photographer, gardener, politics/news junkie, Hillary supporter, (and) retired lady of leisure with 4 dogs and 2 cats."

MONTHLY PROGRAMS

If you missed it: DFO's March, April programs

The DFO website contains a video archive of our monthly fall, winter and spring lecture programs on the Zoom platform. If you could not “attend” our most recent programs live, click the links below to view them as originally delivered.



zoom

Thanks to DFO historian **Kris Haglund** for curating and posting the program videos on the DFO website on the [Past Programs](#) page.



MARCH 27

How Historical Redlining Led Denver's Cooper's Hawks to Live Where They Do

Alyssa Davidge

WATCH ONLINE

Ally Davidge, a graduate assistant in the University of Colorado Denver's Department of Integrative Biology, discussed her research into an intriguing subject: How racially discriminatory human practices within city neighborhood development in the 20th century led more of Denver's increasingly urbanizing Cooper's Hawks to occupy “the best neighborhoods” and fewer hawks to live and hunt in declining ones. As a forest species, Cooper's favors “large tracts of land that contain good quality trees. This is where they like to live, even in cities,” Davidge told her Zoom audience of about 75 viewers. Neighborhood choice and preference “matters for people, of course, but it also matters for Cooper's Hawks.”



APRIL 24

Birdsong and Habitats: Updates from DFO-funded Avian Research

Olivia Taylor (L) and Leah Crenshaw

WATCH ONLINE

Recipients of grants from DFO's [Research, Education and Conservation Fund](#) are asked to report back in person or in writing to the DFO membership the following year about how their projects went. Each April, oral presenters can fulfill that duty at that month's evening program session. At the April 2023 program meeting, two of the 2022 awardees did so via Zoom to an audience of about 30 viewers: **Leah Crenshaw**, a master's thesis student in the School of Biological Sciences at the University of Northern Colorado in Greeley, and **Olivia Taylor**, an undergraduate student in the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at the University of Colorado Boulder.

Crenshaw's research project, “Analyzing grassland bird song and success at a landscape level: The impact of landscape characteristics on Western Meadowlarks,” explored how landscape changes in Colorado's Pawnee National Grasslands may affect birdsong and individual fitness among Western Meadowlarks there.

Taylor's research project, “Character displacement of Mountain Chickadee song where they co-occur with Black-capped Chickadees,” focused on whether and how geographic isolation in chickadee populations influences evolution of birdsong. Her study area was the canyons above Boulder and the CU campus.

Members re-elect and add new DFO leaders in April vote

Patrick O'Driscoll

Denver Field Ornithologists has a new president: **Sharon Tinianow**, a 7-year member of the club and DFO vice president since 2021. She was elected in April in the annual membership vote online for officers and board members. Tinianow succeeds **Susan Blansett**, who served two years each as president (2021-23) and vice president (2019-21).

Two other previous DFO officers also were elected: Secretary **Nate Bond**, who had been appointed in 2022 on an interim basis, and Treasurer **Kathy Holland**, a 2021 appointee who was first elected last year. All three will serve 1-year terms, with the option of running again next year and beyond.

Also elected were several members of the club's governing body, the DFO Board of Directors. They include **Cyndy Johnson**, appointed an interim board member earlier this year and also chair of DFO's Membership Committee; **Roger Koester**, board member since 2020 and chair of the DFO Finance Committee; **Janet Peters**, chair of the DFO Hawk Watch Committee and a first-time board member; **Courtney Rella**, also a first-time board member and a volunteer elsewhere in raptor education, seasonal bird monitoring and wildland restoration; and **Bill Turner**, a longtime board member and DFO's manager of monthly programs. Board members serve 3-year terms and also can be re-elected.

Tinianow, a Denver resident, has served in several roles since joining DFO in 2016. Among various projects during her vice presidency, Sharon led task forces to revise DFO's Policies & Procedures manual and to create the

club's new "feather" logo. She also served as chair of the Communications & Outreach Committee and acting chair of the club's Conservation and Better Birding Skills committees. Sharon also was editor of this newsletter, *The Lark Bunting*, for three years (June 2017-March 2020). She first became a birder when she took an ornithology course as an undergrad at Kent State University in Ohio. She moved to Denver in 2012 and is now retired from the University of Colorado Museum of Natural History.

A total of 148 members cast ballots. The 2023 election results do not include a new vice president, as no one volunteered to serve in that post. If a prospective candidate does come forward or is recruited sometime soon, the DFO Board can appoint an interim vice president to serve until the next election in April 2024.

All DFO members in good standing are eligible to serve in these club leadership positions, as well as on DFO committees and in other volunteer roles. If contributing some of your time, energy and ideas to DFO interests you, visit the "[VOLUNTEER TODAY](#)" page on the club website. You can check off or indicate what tasks or roles interest you, and you'll be contacted by a DFO representative to discuss further.





Fire-charred signpost at entry to Dino Ridge observation point
Mike Fernandez

HAWK WATCH

Wind-whipped wildfire tests Hawk Watch

Mike Fernandez

Just four weeks into the 2023 spring DFO Hawk Watch season, unexpectedly severe and dangerous weather had DFO's volunteers anxious and on edge at our counting station atop exposed Dinosaur Ridge in Jefferson County.

On Thursday, March 30, strong winds hampered viewing with gusts that kicked up debris, scattered dust clouds across the eastern horizon, and cut short the day's counting at noon. The next day, forecasts of gale-force wind led to cancellation of the March 31 count for safety reasons. (Readings later showed even higher, more dangerous conditions that day: sustained winds of 60 mph with gusts of more than 80 mph.)

The daily Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch report ahead of April 1 appeared to promise a return to a normal day of hourly counts of migrating birds of prey, as well as added notations of non-migrating birds, human visitors and better weather: "Tomorrow, 4/1, should see very calm winds from the east for at least the morning . . ."



Hogback Fire: 100% contained



Fire notice on Facebook by West Metro Fire



Continued on page 13

But our team did not know that the high winds were about to down a power line near the ridge, sparking a 44-acre wildfire later on March 31 that spread within inches all around the DFO team's viewing post. Those two days of worsening winds triggered a week-long wait, in prime raptor-migration season, to return to our counting duty.

As West Metro Fire Rescue attacked what became known as the Hogback Fire, daily Hawk Watch reports from the sidelined counters filled in the timeline. Here are some excerpts:

SATURDAY, APRIL 1

"Matthews-Winters Park and the Dakota Ridge trail to the Hawk Watch are closed until further notice due to an active wildfire on the hogback ridge. The fire burned up to the (viewing) site . . . We will provide updates each day when possible."

SUNDAY, APRIL 2

"Access to our site is still closed due to the fire. As of yesterday afternoon the fire was not fully contained, and the trail has burnt downed trees and fire debris."

MONDAY, APRIL 3

"The fire is now 100% contained. (Jefferson) County is limiting access to the area due to ongoing trail cleanup of fallen trees. They are allowing the Hawk Watch team access to complete the count beginning tomorrow."

TUESDAY, APRIL 4

"No count conducted. A winter storm dropped several inches of snow and created blizzard conditions in the area. All scheduled volunteers should plan on counting beginning tomorrow."

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 5

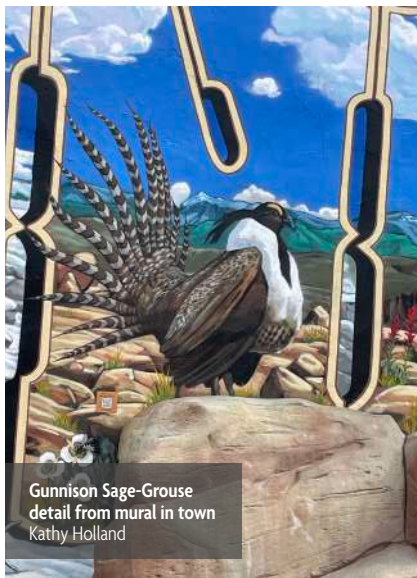
"Today was our first day back on the ridge . . . Our site is intact, but we can see the burn scar surrounding the platform. The fire burned 44 acres along the ridge . . . (We) enjoyed a sunny morning with mild temperatures and winds out of the west . . . A shift in winds brought enough snow to drastically decrease visibility. We ended the count at (4 p.m.) due to the low visibility."

Returning to the ridge, the Hawk Watch team found how close a call it had been. Everything around the rugged and rocky observation post burned, right up to its edges. The fire's heat melted the Hawk Watch information sign. More than a month later, the smell of wildfire smoke remains strong.

But Dinosaur Ridge is resilient. Vegetation regrowth has already begun, and the blackened burn scar is turning a stunning emerald green. Ground birds are back, including two local friends, a Rock Wren and a Spotted Towhee. The daily migrating raptor counts are back up in encouraging numbers, too. Best of all, no DFO hawk watchers were hurt, thanks to the sensible call by **Emma Riley**, our wise young count leader, to shut down and evacuate the ridge hours before the wildfire took off.



*A DFO member since 2014, **Mike Fernandez** edits the mid-month DFO Digest and is assistant editor of The Lark Bunting. A neighborhood and schools advocate for 40 years, he is a retired Interior Department communications manager.*



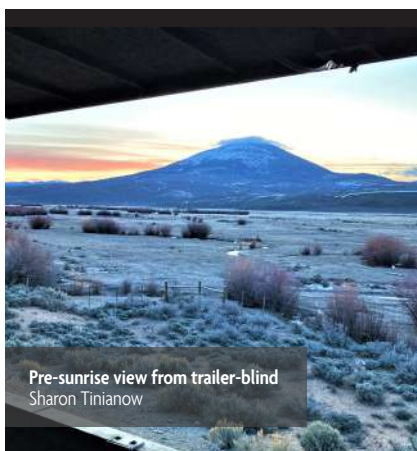
Gunnison Sage-Grouse detail from mural in town
Kathy Holland



DFO member Graham Ray scopes for sage-grouse
Sharon Tinianow



DFO sage-grouse crew, L to R, Sharon Tinianow, Kathy Holland, Archer Silverman (front), Graham Ray, Susan Blansett, Nate Bond



Pre-sunrise view from trailer-blind
Sharon Tinianow

FIELD TRIPS

Sisk-a-dee-lightful: A pre-dawn date with our own Gunnison Sage-Grouse

Sharon Tinianow

Colorado's Gunnison Sage-Grouse is a rare bird, indeed. Habitat destruction has reduced its numbers by 87 percent. Just 4,000 individuals remain, in seven populations in southwestern Colorado and southeastern Utah. The largest population returns to the same spot each year about 20 miles east of the species' namesake Gunnison, CO.

And that spot — the [Waunita Watchable Wildlife Area](#) — is where a small group of DFO members met with other birders on a chilly, pre-dawn morning in April, all hoping to see these rarities perform their annual mating rituals.

Our hosts were from [Sisk-a-dee](#), a nonprofit organization that coordinates the Gunnison Sage-Grouse Watchable Wildlife Program in partnership with Colorado Parks & Wildlife, Western Colorado University and the Gunnison Basin Sage-Grouse Strategic Committee. Founded in 2000, Sisk-a-dee takes its name from the Shoshone word for this extraordinary species.

The [Gunnison Sage-Grouse](#) was only recognized as a separate species from Greater Sage-Grouse in 2000. Like Greater and Lesser Prairie-Chickens, sage-grouse congregate every spring on traditional breeding grounds, called leks, where the males engage in elaborate, chest-puffing displays to attract females to mate.

Gunnison Sage-Grouse leks occupy openings in the sagebrush steppes, with room enough for complex mating displays in which males fan their tail feathers and inflate bright yellow air sacs, all accompanied by grunting vocalizations. Female birds, which are about two-thirds the size of the males, select those they deem most attractive and mate with them. The females then go off alone into the surrounding sagebrush to find nest sites, having nothing more to do with the males.

DFO Treasurer **Kathy Holland** arranged for our club group visit to the Waunita lek outside Gunnison, an experience we shared with 11 other birders. We met in the pre-dawn darkness on April 21 outside the Holiday Inn & Suites on the east edge of town. Our guide, a student from Gunnison's Western Colorado University nearby, delivered a few guidelines about our destination and how to behave when we got there. Then we formed a car caravan to travel 19 miles east on U.S. 50 to the viewing site.

Continued on page 15

Emerging from our cars at Waunita, we were instantly awestruck — not by the still-distant birds, but by a cloudless, moonless sky, black and spangled with a zillion stars. Conditioned by urban life, I had forgotten what it was like to see not just the Big Dipper, but the entire Milky Way!

Gathering up spotting scopes, backpacks and blankets or sleeping bags for warmth against the 16-degree cold, we made our way to the viewing trailer. Inside this metal blind, we chose spots on two long benches and settled in. Our combined body heat and handwarmers made the wait for dawn tolerable for a while. Fortunately, there was no wind.

Just before dawn began to break, panels on the side of the trailer facing the lek were raised, and we began to scan a distant meadow. The birds had been seen recently about a half-mile away, in an opening in front of a fence. As we continued to scan, the melodious singing of Song Sparrows came to life from willow shrubs. A Western Meadowlark joined the dawn chorus.

And then, just as the eastern sky turned pink, there was movement. Black dots became black birds with white chest feathers. We were beginning to see them: Gunnison Sage-Grouse! They scurried one way, then back. They puffed their chests, stuck their tails in the air and strutted. Soon there were a dozen, then more, sort of bobbing up and down. A few females joined the displaying males.

As the sky grew lighter, the view got better. Too far away to get good pictures, a few of us tried digiscoping with our smart phones. But once the sun cleared the top of the mountain, the show was over. The birds flew off. We packed up and exited the trailer into a chilly spring morning, surrounded by sagebrush and birdsong.

Babbling continuously, a Sage Thrasher popped up long enough for some decent photos as the Song Sparrows and meadowlarks continued their chorus. As we took in the spectacular Gunnison Valley scenery, we smiled, laughed, and thanked our guide.

Back in town over a wonderfully hot and well-earned breakfast, we shared impressions and photos together, marveling over the whole experience — seeing such distinctive birds, in their unique habitat, at their ageless ritual. What a thing!

Sharon Tinianow, who joined DFO in 2016, became club president in April 2023. A former editor of *The Lark Bunting*, she began birding in an ornithology class in college. Sharon retired as assistant director of CU Boulder's Museum of Natural History

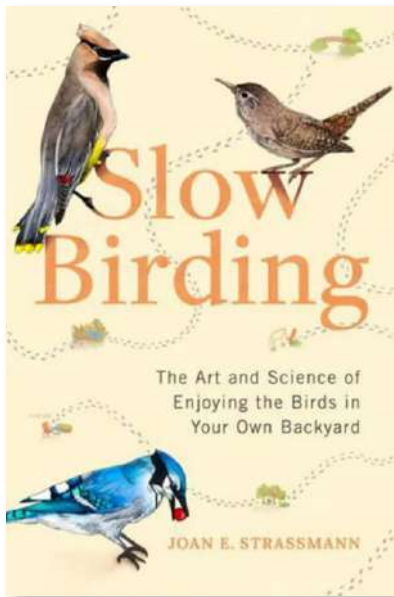
If you'd like to go . . .

Sisk-a-dee's 2023 viewing season for Gunnison Sage-Grouse is almost over and booked out. For information about how to plan a trip next year or beyond, visit the [Sisk-a-dee website](#). If and when you go, here is some useful advice for a successful trip:

- **Plan ahead early.** The viewing trailer holds about 16 people, and the lek is only active between March and May
- **Dress warmly.** April in Gunnison feels like winter. Hand warmers help, as does a blanket or sleeping bag to ward off the cold during the wait for first light
- **SIT warmly.** The benches are cold; a stadium-style seat cushion helps
- **BYO Scope.** Spotting scopes are a must. The grouse are far too distant for binoculars
- **GO before you go!** There are no restrooms at the trailer; even if there were, you must stay put inside until the sage-grouse leave the lek. Avoid caffeine or drinking too much of anything before leaving town

For a good look-and-listen to the mating display of the Gunnison Sage-Grouse, two bird websites have video clips:

- [Cornell Lab's All About Birds guide](#)
- [National Audubon's field guide](#)



BOOK REVIEW

Did you say Merganser? No, meander . . . and not a bad way to go birding

Slow Birding: The Art and Science of Enjoying the Birds in Your Own Backyard

By Joan Strassmann

TarcherPerigree / Penguin Random House (2022)

Available in Audible, narrated by the author

352 pages

Jill Boice

Here is a book to warm my heart. I have always favored slow, meandering bird walks and patch birding. In *Slow Birding*, **Joan Strassman** passionately calls on us to focus further on local birds, and to take our time. She brings together scrupulous research and a readable narrative about 16 common species. Her goal is to share “what animal behaviorists have figured out about birds” so that we understand the “biological underpinnings” of their behavior.

Each chapter delves into several aspects of one species’ traits and describes research exploring what its behavior really means, sometimes with surprising conclusions. Strassmann relates tales from the scientists about their interest in that bird and how the research has evolved. She details their patient, painstaking processes, and the range of technologies now in use is quite astonishing. Each chapter ends with suggested activities for the slow birder.

The first chapter is about Blue Jays. Strassmann writes that this bird’s mutualism with oak trees — that is, a shared dependence upon each other by bird and tree — changed our continent as Ice Age glaciers receded. She explains that in the 1930s, **Joseph Grinnell**, a prominent ecologist and field biologist, found that Blue Jays carried away and buried large numbers of acorns for later use, thus helping spread the tree species. In the 1980s, Virginia Tech biologists **Susan Darley Hill** and **Carter Johnson** followed Grinnell’s lead and carefully studied the foraging habits of Blue Jays on their campus. They found that 11 trees in their study produced 246,000 acorns, more than half of which (54 percent) were carried off by jays to cache. A few years later, another pair of researchers determined that Blue Jays readily found their buried acorns. These studies helped establish a broader appreciation of bird intelligence.

In the chapter on House Wrens, we learn that species is among many that may raise young from several mates together. Strassmann introduces us to **Charlie Thompson**, who has studied the lives of House Wrens for 40 years. His team in Illinois now has a network of 820 nest boxes and data from them has contributed to many other studies. One such study, by Towson University scientists **L. Scott Johnson** and **Brian Masters**, found that 15 percent of the chicks they observed, bled and banded were NOT fathered by the male tending the nest — that is, they were the product of “extra-pair liaisons.” With Thompson’s nest-box network, they collected robust data to back their findings: 521 broods with 3,123 chicks!

Continued on page 17



Welcome to new DFO members

William Brookshire of Littleton; Nicole Callaway, Denver; Jill Engel-Cox, Golden; Zoe, Sebastian and Derek Freed, Lakewood; Janiece Gratch, Lakewood; Emma Hamilton, Denver; Tally Kerr, Falcon; JoAnn Potter Riggle, Eagle; Robert Rolland, Denver; Josh Mattison and Archer Silverman, Denver; and Robert and Jennifer Tonge, Denver

Thank you for your contribution

Research, Education and Conservation Grants Fund

Nicole Callaway, Tally Kerr, and Bob and Nancy Stocker

Friends of DFO

Alice Turak, and Diane Wagner

DFO's Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch

Zoe, Sebastian and Derek Freed,
and Bob and Nancy Stocker



BOOK REVIEW *cont from page 16*

My favorite chapter is about Cooper's Hawks. I had known that the pesticide DDT, in widespread use after 1945, had affected many bird species, and Bald Eagles perhaps most famously. I had not known, however, that DDT brought Cooper's Hawks to the edge of extinction. DDT wasn't banned until 1972, a decade after **Rachel Carson's** *Silent Spring* warned of its danger. But studies begun in 1980 on these then-increasingly rare hawks still found DDT in their eggs, though fortunately not enough to thin their eggshells as it had eagles'. Today, Cooper's has rebounded and is commonly seen near our bird feeders in search of a songbird meal.

I believe this accumulated, careful research about behavior, food choices and habitat will help create more effective management and conservation planning for birds. We already see that in the use of abundant citizen-science data gathered in eBird. This is one area where I find Strassman's book lacking. She doesn't connect the scientific knowledge forward to suggest how we might use it to protect these species in the long term. Perhaps that is understood, but I'd rather that she had tried to help us make that leap.

Slow Birding is not the kind of book you sit down and read from cover to cover. I like that you can pick chapters about birds in your own area, and there is much more to browse, both forward and back. Birders of any level are bound to find material here to enrich their enjoyment of birding.

Jill Boice, who joined DFO in 2001, leads occasional slow field trips. She is also a volunteer raptor monitor at Cherry Creek State Park.



CONSERVATION

Bird flu update: Daunting test for Colorado rehabbers

Michael Tincher

Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) has challenged bird rehabilitation facilities greatly — not only in how to care for infected birds, but also how to protect birds already under facility care and the humans who provide that care. They must follow biosecurity protocols every step of the way, from picking up sick birds to final disposition of their remains. Unfortunately, in almost all cases of HPAI, birds succumb quickly to the virus or won't survive their advanced neurological state or deteriorating condition and must be humanely euthanized. To date, only a few birds have recovered to be released back into the wild.

As of early April, Colorado had recorded 226 confirmed cases of avian influenza in wild birds. The actual number is significantly greater, but we lack an official count of all the likely casualties. A particular mass die-off might involve 2,000 birds, but not every individual can be tested. Thus, if 10 test positive for HPAI, that's 10 confirmed cases, not 2,000, but the event would still be attributed to bird flu.

Since spring of 2022, the [Rocky Mountain Raptor Program](#) in Fort Collins has admitted 46 raptors that have tested positive for HPAI. Most were admitted from fall of 2022 through winter 2022-23, and most of these patients were Red-tailed Hawks and Great Horned Owls. One of those hawks was cleared of the virus, successfully rehabilitated and released.

This disease is dealt with far differently in commercial poultry flocks. A confirmed positive case forces immediate quarantine and euthanizing of entire flocks to prevent spread because the virus is so highly transmissible in closer quarters. Affected facilities must then be thoroughly decontaminated before new poultry stocks can be brought in. More than 6 million chickens and other poultry in commercial Colorado facilities and backyard pens have had to be destroyed.

Spillover of HPAI infections into Colorado's wild mammal populations is also a concern. Red foxes, skunks, raccoons, mountain lions, black bears and bobcats have been infected. None of those species, however, has been documented as having spread the disease further.

The vast majority of Colorado infections were detected between late summer 2022 and early March 2023, which coincided with cooler temperatures and fall migration. Fortunately, the HPAI virus does not survive well in the heat, dryness and stronger ultraviolet radiation of a typical Colorado summer. New avian flu cases have fallen significantly since early March, but an uptick is expected as many birds pass through with spring migration.

Here's good advice for birders and anyone out in nature right now: If you encounter any wild birds or other wildlife that appear "off" — with signs of seizures, loss of balance or too easily approachable by humans — contact your nearest wildlife rehabilitator or local office of [Colorado Parks & Wildlife](#). If you find a dead migratory bird that appears to have fallen out of a tree or looks otherwise in good body condition, consider it suspect and possibly a case of HPAI. A single dead bird along a busy road isn't likely to be a victim of avian flu, but if you encounter more than three dead birds in one place, please report it to Parks & Wildlife, too.

Michael Tincher is rehab and research coordinator for the [Rocky Mountain Raptor Program](#), which since 1987 has rescued, treated and released sick and injured birds of prey in the northern Front Range, northeast CO and eastern WY. A member of the Raptor Research Foundation, he joined the RMRP in 2004.

Avian flu mortality among wild birds in Colorado

Patrick O'Driscoll

Exact counts for wild-bird deaths in Colorado from avian influenza are hard to come by. State agencies monitoring the epidemic rely on reports from the public, including birders like us, to track numbers. But official statistics usually only include cases confirmed by pre- or post-mortem testing, which are far fewer than anecdotal reports.

Colorado Parks & Wildlife has made wild-bird mortality estimations for 2022, the year the disease first swept into the state, affecting wild populations, commercial poultry farms and backyard pens. The tally outlined below estimates that as many as 10,800 wild birds in 16 species, the vast majority of them waterfowl, died of avian flu last year.

Courtney Rella, a new DFO Board member whose own volunteer work with birds and wildlife has included helping Parks & Wildlife collect reports of birds sick or dead of avian flu, asked the department to provide a summary of avian flu cases in wild birds. In reply, CPW wildlife pathologist **Karen Fox** sent the following list. “This is an estimate of mortality based on confirmed cases, as well as the reports of suspects that we gather from the public,” Fox explained. “When I have a confirmed case in a combination of species/county/season, I do not test additional birds but I do add any suspects from that species/county/season to the estimated mortality total.”

Added Rella: “It goes to further support how much our vigilance and reporting is necessary throughout the state.”

Here is the CPR wild-bird mortality estimate list for 2022:

- Snow Goose — 8,000-10,000 birds
- Ross's Goose — 2
- Canada Goose — 600
- Cackling Goose — 11
- Common Merganser — 100
- Wood Duck — 4 (also positive for West Nile Virus)
- Blue-winged Teal — 2
- Mallard — 3
- American White Pelican — 8
- Great Horned Owl — 21
- Turkey Vulture — 3
- Bald Eagle — 6 (including 1 eaglet)
- Red-tailed Hawk — 29
- Cooper's Hawk — 1
- Ring-billed Gull — 1
- American Crow — 11



Merganser dead of avian flu, Denver City Park
Patrick O'Driscoll

Club Quarterly: DFO business update

Editor's note: Denver Field Ornithologists' Board of Directors meets four times a year. The Lark Bunting publishes this quarterly synopsis after the August, November, February and May meetings. Minutes, financial reports and committee reports to the board are available to members on the ["DFO BUSINESS" page](#) of the club website.



DFO BOARD FEBRUARY 2023 MEETING

The quarterly meeting of the DFO Board took place on Feb. 26 via Zoom, 2 p.m. to 4:35 p.m. MST. All 16 board members and club officers attended.



MINUTES OF NOVEMBER MEETING

After unanimous approval of the minutes of the November 2022 meeting, Secretary **Nate Bond** outlined a new format to expedite processing of the official record for board meetings. Draft minutes will be emailed to board members and officers to edit via Google Docs within two weeks after the meeting, with email approval thereafter to save time at future meetings.



TREASURER'S REPORT

Treasurer **Kathy Holland** reported that she has opened an interest-bearing account with \$20,000 in DFO funds to manage club finances, locked in for one year on a trial basis. In discussing DFO's tax-exempt nonprofit status, she said the club has filed two Form 1099s for the 2022 tax year. As annually in previous years, a financial reviewer has gone over the club's books and "things look good," with a follow-up report to come. During discussion of budgets, Finance Committee chair **Roger Koester** noted that increased spending year-to-year is closely tied to increased contributions from members and other donors. He cautioned care and close monitoring to changes in income to ensure fiscal responsibility.



SCIENCE/EDUCATION GRANTS

Grants chair **Elaine Wagner** reported on five projects recommended for funding in 2023 from the DFO Research, Conservation & Education Grants Committee. The combined total of \$9,100 in fund awards reflects an unexpectedly large balance bolstered by rising donations and, in particular, one \$3,000 donation. All but two project proposals for 2023 will receive grants. Wagner said grant submission proposals are available for reading in the members-only area of the DFO website.

During discussion, Holland noticed that the grants line item in the budget was \$7,000, not \$9,100. Koester suggested that grants funding be listed separately from the rest of the DFO budget because of odd timing. It was noted that the Grants Committee has \$11,966 in designated assets (including extra donations and rollover funds from previous years), which enables giving more grants. The board unanimously adopted the Grants Committee's recommendation for \$9,100 in total funds to five grant proposals for 2023.



HAWK WATCH @ DINOSAUR RIDGE

Hawk Watch chair **Dave Hill** noted a successful Hawk Watch program on Feb. 25 and a highly anticipated "Hawks on the Wing" program set for March 1, which also was the formal starting date of the 2023 spring Hawk Watch @ Dinosaur Ridge counting season. He then offered a motion from the Hawk Watch Committee for the board to fund \$1,275 for four in-classroom education programs for schools in the 2023-24 academic year, to be presented by Hawk Watch partner Nature's Educators. Extensive board discussion followed.

Vice President **Sharon Tinianow** noted that Hawk Watch already had applied unsuccessfully for an identical grant from Denver Audubon's Lois Webster Fund. She questioned the timing of the request outside the board's previous November budgeting cycle for this year. Hill said feedback from the Lois Webster Fund was positive but that there were more projects needing funds than dollars available. Other discussion touched on Hawk Watch's significant budget increase (\$5,000) since 2022, in part because of greater 2022 donations for the project. But treasurer Holland noted the \$1,260 contributed so far for 2023 is well below what's expected by the end of this year. Grants chair Wagner noted that in previous funding discussions, education grants hadn't been a top board priority.

Continued on page 21

Koester said Hawk Watch also could apply for a grant from DFO's Grants Committee, whose purview includes education, not just research and conservation. It was also noted there's still time ahead to return to this issue in budgeting for next year. After discussion, Hill withdrew the motion for now.



At 2022 DFO raptor program
Patrick O'Driscoll

COMMUNICATIONS & OUTREACH

Board member and newsletter editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** reported that *The Lark Bunting* seeks a member-volunteer to write a short review each issue for the previous monthly evening program. He also welcomed all feedback about the newsletter's content, issue to issue — but then expressed frustration at a noticeable lack of it thus far, either negative or positive.

Tinianow, acting C&O Committee chair, discussed the possibility of switching online platforms for committee and other small DFO meetings from Zoom to Google Meet. DFO's Zoom account requires one of three club facilitators to run most meetings, but Google Meet requires no separate moderator for small group meetings and is free of charge. Zoom would still remain DFO's platform for larger monthly evening programs. After positive reaction from committee chairs, Tinianow said she will explore Google Meets further and report back.

BETTER BIRDING SKILLS

The Better Birding Skills Committee will seek to work with Colorado Parks & Wildlife to develop DFO workshops around specific birding habitats, to be hosted by members with interest and knowledge in each type of ecosystem. The effort is targeted for mid-summer, and members with specific habitat knowledge and interest can contact Tinianow via email.

FIELD TRIPS

Field Trip chair David Suddjian celebrated DFO's very busy February, normally a slow birding month. (*For a detailed report on how DFO's "February Funniness" went, see the article in last month's May 2023 issue of The Lark Bunting on the newsletter's [archives page](#) on the DFO website.*) Suddjian also called attention to the Field Trip Committee's efforts to develop a collaboration with Aiken Audubon in Colorado Springs to promote, register and lead joint field trips in the near future.



2022 raptor program audience
Patrick O'Driscoll

ELECTIONS

Election chair **Mary Geder** reviewed the pending list of candidates for the DFO Board and officers election in April, noting member **Mary Cay Burger's** retirement after 20 years on the board and member **Sue Summers'** previous withdrawal. Those declared as candidates for election or re-election

Continued on page 22

at that time included Tinianow for president (up from vice president to succeed **Susan Blansett**), Bond for secretary (appointed in 2022 and seeking election) and Holland for treasurer again. Board candidates included Koester (re-election), **Cyndy Johnson** (interim appointee for election) and **Bill Turner** (re-election). Geder was still trying to recruit a candidate for vice president. In that vein, **Karen Drozda** suggested that board members and officers keep an eye out on DFO field trips for prospective volunteers for club leadership positions. Given that past DFO tradition and practice has been for the vice president to step up to the presidency after two years, there was discussion of being less rigid about that to encourage prospective VP candidates to come forward.

CONSERVATION

Conservation chair **Steve Ryder** reported on several ongoing topics of Conservation Committee discussion and work:

- Support of “Cats Indoors” promotion to curb domestic feline predation on birds
- Support for preserving Denver’s defunct Park Hill Golf Course site as open space vs. commercial and housing development (the subject of an April 4 citywide vote)
- The fate of birding at the popular Chico Basin Ranch hotspot in El Paso and Pueblo counties once a new ranching lease — and onerous state government restrictions on non-ranching activity — take effect in 2025. *(For more detailed background, read the article in the April 2023 issue of The Lark Bunting on the newsletter’s [archive page](#).)*

In addition, Tinianow asked Ryder to clarify a note in his committee report about having signed on to an “environmental platform” developed by The Nature Conservancy, apparently without DFO Board involvement. Ryder said he would send a link to that platform to all board members for review and further discussion.

MEMBERSHIP

Membership chair **Cyndy Johnson** said the committee was working through the club’s roster to ensure that all members who may have forgotten would be notified to renew

membership for 2023, as year-by-year DFO memberships expire at the end of December.

PROGRAMS

Programs manager Bill Turner noted the winter-spring season of programs was underway in January, with previously scheduled evening sessions on tap for the fourth Mondays in February, March and April. He also teased a special guest for the first fall monthly program in late August: Celebrated Colorado landscape photographer **John Fielder**.

NEW BUSINESS + MISCELLANY

Goodbye Mary Cay

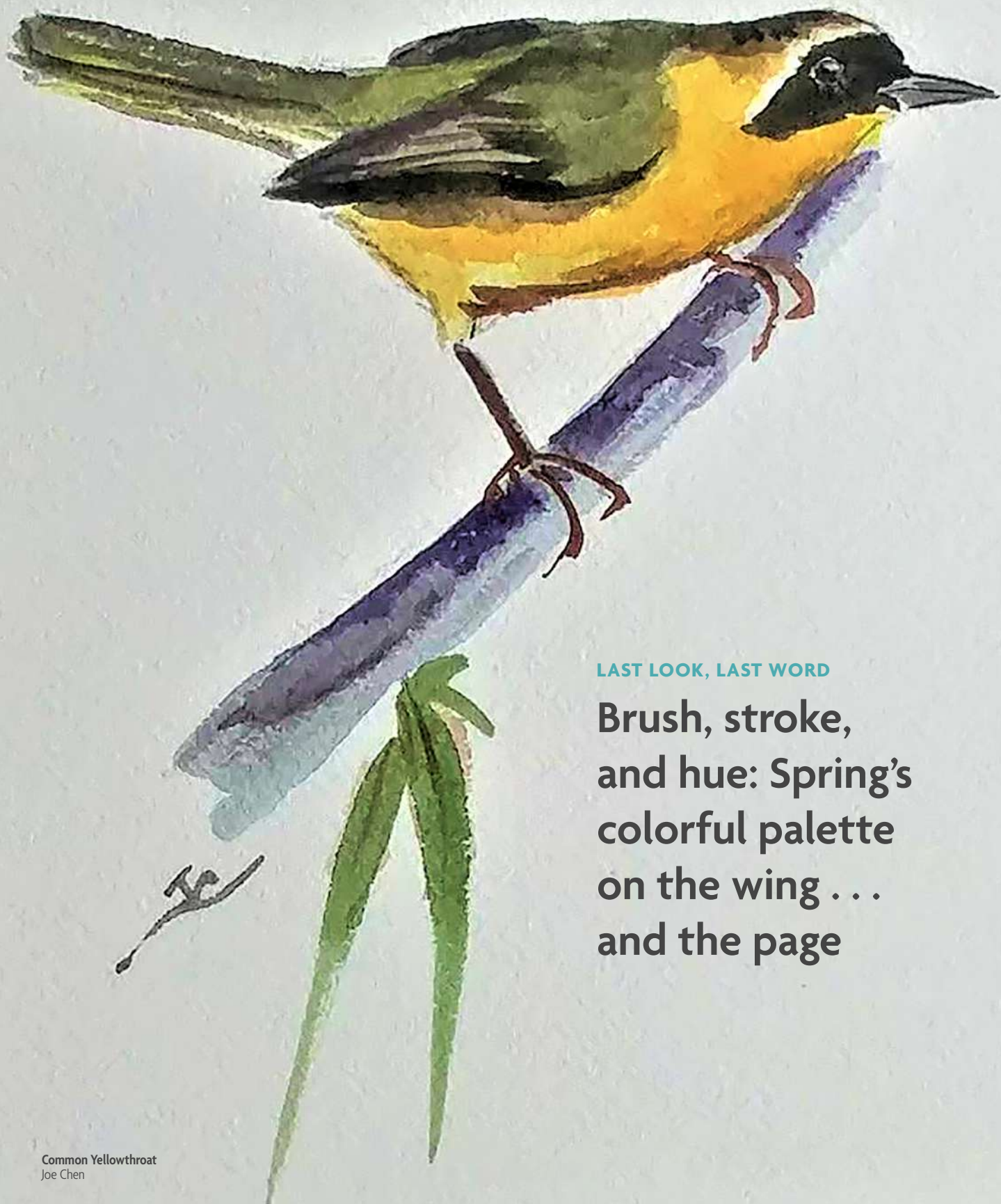
The board and officers voiced warm appreciation for Burger’s 20 years of DFO Board involvement and numerous other forms of volunteer service, including years as DFO Membership chair

Volunteer Appreciation

Tinianow announced a save-the-date calendar entry for a **DFO Volunteer Appreciation Event** on **Sunday, June 4, 9-11 a.m. MDT**, at the Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge. Besides putting out a call for volunteers to help put on the event, she also floated the idea of creating a system of volunteer awards beyond DFO’s highest member honor, the Ptarmigan Award, which recognizes extraordinary service to the club

The board’s next quarterly meeting is scheduled for **Monday, May 22** via Zoom.





LAST LOOK, LAST WORD

**Brush, stroke,
and hue: Spring's
colorful palette
on the wing . . .
and the page**

Patrick O'Driscoll

It's peak spring migration across Colorado! We're fanning out, by the ones and twos and dozens, to greet, observe and revel in seasonal bursts of avian visitors. Our best eyes, and our best photographers, are on the case. Who knows what new state-record birds might emerge before our relentless, wide-eyed lenses?

Amidst our semiannual hubbub, *The Lark Bunting* pauses this month for a less hectic and more calming look at Colorado's returning feathered friends. Join us as we mark this busiest birding month of May with a visual stroll through an art gallery of spring birds. From this month's newsletter cover bird (Lazuli Bunting) to our back-page beauty (Western Tanager), all were brought to life with paint on paper by DFO birder, field-trip warrior and artist **Joe Chen** of Denver.



Continued on page 25



Tree Swallow
Joe Chen



Bullock's Oriole
Joe Chen



Lark Sparrow
Joe Chen

LAST LOOK, LAST WORD *cont from page 24*

If you visit the Denver Field Ornithologists' [Facebook Group Page](#), you've seen Joe's work before. Since joining DFO in 2018, he has chosen a single bird after every field trip to preserve in a painting and share it online. He figures he's painted 250 to 300 field-trip birds so far. Joe keeps the originals in 15 folio-binders (and counting), and occasionally he frames one or another as gifts.

"People still ask me after the trip what am I going to paint. I say, 'I don't know.' When I get home, I think about it and reflect on it," he says. "And then, just popping something into my mind." Once he has the bird in front, Chen reaches back into memory, and the details begin to emerge.

"Sometimes I get lucky and can use my cellphone to take a picture of the bird," he says, "But usually I try to keep the bird as close as possible in the mind as I remember. Where the bird was — this kind of tree, or walking on the ground, or standing on top of a post. An impression." He turns to a field guide only "for reference — to make sure I've got all the parts, the picture correct."

When he's done, it's all there: the violet and green of the swallow, the brightness of the Bullock's Oriole, the sharp glare of the Burrowing Owl, the vivid face of the Lark Sparrow, the Mountain Bluebird's blue, the Common Yellowthroat's yellow.

Enjoy them here, and out there. Good spring birding, everyone.



Barn Swallow
Joe Chen



Mountain Bluebird
Joe Chen



Burrowing Owl
Joe Chen

Until the next Lark Bunting . . .
**GOOD MIGRATION
BIRDING!**



Western Tanager
Joe Chen



THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 59 | ISSUE 07-08 | JULY-AUGUST 2023

DFOBIRDS.ORG

DFO SKILLS WORKSHOP

Finding the birds that
fit Colorado habitats

PAGE 9

FROM THE PRESIDENT

In the room? Or Zoom?
How we meet, again

PAGE 5

LENDING HANDS, HEARTS

Celebrating the selflessness
of DFO's volunteers

PAGE 12

LAST LOOK, LAST WORD

Photo gallery: Safe in
the nest, gone too soon

PAGE 22

dfo
DENVER FIELD
ORNITHOLOGISTS



Blue Jay
Green Valley Ranch, Denver
Jim Esten



ON THE COVER

Blue Jay: Impossibly blue squawker, neighborhood stasher of all things nut

I have a soft spot for this month's cover bird, the Blue Jay (*Cyanocitta Cristata*) — and by “soft spot” I also mean my backyard “wreath” feeder. It's a soft target, and the jays are deadeye sharpshooters.

When it's high season in Blue Jay Land, I've had as many as seven of these shrill, electric-blue yakity-yakkers taking turns yanking peanuts out of the wire wreath and darting into nearby trees. They'll either park there to unshell the sweet meat on the spot, or pause a couple of beats, hop tree to tree, then zoom off on a distant arc across the neighborhood, en route to . . . well, I don't really know *where* they go, actually.

Or I didn't until I read up on these striking backyard visitors in *Birds of The World* and other avian resources. I figured they cached my peanuts for later retrieval somewhere. But where? In another tree? A hole in a wall? A peanut cemetery?

Turns out I'm close on that last guess. Blue Jays *bury* their nuts and acorns, from 150 yards to 2½ miles away from where they found them. They plant them in open patches of disturbed ground for up to 3 feet around. All that caching means these corvid kleptos keep coming back for more — which explains my own shrinking cache. Sometimes I'm refilling the wreath daily. When the jays are going full bore, I'm buying peanuts-in-the-shell 25 pounds at a time. Crazy, I know, but get this: A single adult can consume and cache three to five THOUSAND acorns, peanuts and other nuts a year.

The crows and even my local Black-capped Chickadees have wised up to the peanut wreath. After grappling awkwardly, a crow usually will use bulk and brute strength to jar peanuts loose to the ground (But careful! Fox Squirrels lie in wait to steal them). The chickadees, and sometimes flickers and Downy Woodpeckers, will *tappity-tap* away at peanuts in the wreath until the shells give and they pry out the contents bit by bit, leaving hollow, holey husks *in situ*.

Some backyard bird aficionados loathe Blue Jays as aggressive, loud-mouthed bullies, but I love their racket. Sometimes it's the mob signaling there's a Cooper's Hawk nearby. It always means there's a handsome, colorful bird out there, and who knows what other species. “It's a party!” they seem to shriek. “Get over here!” or “Outta my way!”

What's not to like about a bird that Scottish ornithologist (and immigrant to America) **Alexander Wilson** — he of Wilson's warbler, snipe and phalarope — once referred to admiringly as a “beau among feathered tenants of our woods, by the brilliancy of his dress; and like most other coxcombs, makes himself still more conspicuous by his loquacity, and the oddness of his tones and gestures.”

For all the hubbub, most Blue Jays are in monogamous pairs that stay in the same vicinity year-round (though some do migrate farther). They tend not to flock except loosely on occasion, as when mobbing a predator.

Even when I don't see them for weeks at a time (like now in nesting season), I feel like they're still out there, preparing to delight me when next I see one. I can live with that.

— **Patrick O'Driscoll**, editor



IN THIS ISSUE

- 2 On the Cover**
Blue Jay: Impossibly blue squawker, neighborhood stasher of all things nut
- 5 From the President**
From no more room to Zoom — and beyond: Meeting together in changing times
- 7 DFO News Notes**
- 9 Workshops**
DFO skills workshops return! “Bird Habitats of the Front Range” in July
- 10 Monthly Programs**
- 12 DFO News**
Rainy out, warm within: Celebrating DFO volunteers with food, awards . . . and owls!
- 15 Conservation**
Hawk Watch 2023: Wet and windy on the ridge, but the results were hot
- 16 Birding/Conservation**
Chico Basin: Birding lease details jell as pitch for next ranch operator goes public
- 22 Last Look, Last Word**
Safe at home . . . and gone too soon

The Lark Bunting newsletter of Denver Field Ornithologists is published online monthly at dfobirds.org except for joint issues in July–August and February–March.

PUBLICATION STAFF

Editor

Patrick O'Driscoll

Assistant Editor

Mike Fernandez

Photo Editor

Jim Esten

Layout and Design

Jennie Dillon

Contributors this issue

Jason Bidgood, Tamie Bulow, Jim Esten, Mike Fernandez, John Fielder, Kris Haglund, Linda Hodges, Janet Peters, Dave Prentice, Georgy Semenov, Bob Stocker, David Suddjian, Scott Taylor, Sharon Tinianow

CONTRIBUTE TO THE NEWSLETTER

Submit original articles or story ideas to the editor at patodrisk@gmail.com.

Send image-file photos of birds or bird outings to the photo editor at jcesten@gmail.com.

Editors reserve the right to accept and edit suitable articles and photos for publication.

NEWSLETTER ADVERTISING

The Lark Bunting does not accept or contain paid advertising. DFO **AdBIRDtisements** are FREE to club members to seek or sell bird-related equipment, supplies, books and decorative items (artwork, photos, clothing, note cards, etc.).

- Ads must include name, email and/or telephone number, and may include weblink if items offered online
- Ads may be edited for inappropriate content or excessive length (125-word limit); ONE photo or image per ad
- Ads do not carry over each month. To renew, resubmit by next deadline
- Available *only* to DFO members
- Deadline: last day of month except January and June (*The Lark Bunting* does not publish in February and July)

Send AdBIRDtisement materials to editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com.

Next deadline: Monday, July 31



© 2023 Denver Field Ornithologists. All rights reserved



**A community of birders,
learning and acting together
for avian wildlife**

Denver Field Ornithologists is an all-volunteer organization that conducts hundreds of free birdwatching field trips throughout the year and welcomes participation and membership by all. DFO promotes enjoyment of nature, the study of birds, and protection of them and their habitats in greater Denver and beyond.

In addition to field trips, evening programs and birding workshops, DFO conducts community science in the field, including the spring Hawk Watch raptor migration count on Dinosaur Ridge.

DFO awards grants annually for bird-related research, education and conservation projects in Colorado. For more information, visit the [Research, Education & Conservation Grants](#) page on the DFO website.

DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and financial contributions to DFO's three giving funds are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

DFO OFFICERS

President

Sharon Tinianow
sharontinianow@gmail.com

Vice President

Matt Rodgers (Interim)
mattrodgers79@gmail.com

Secretary

Nathan Bond
dfobirds.secretary@gmail.com

Treasurer

Kathy Holland
kcloudview@comcast.net

Past President

Susan Blansett
susan.blansett@gmail.com

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Karen Drozda
drozforte@aol.com

Mary Geder
mfg5000@live.com

Cyndy Johnson
cyndyjohnson28@msn.com

Tina Jones
tjcalliope@hotmail.com

Roger Koester
koester1949@gmail.com

Patrick O'Driscoll
patodrisk@gmail.com

Janet Peters
j.f.peters58@gmail.com

Courtney Rella
dr.cawtney@gmail.com

David Suddjian
dsuddjian@gmail.com

Bill Turner
toursbyturner@aol.com

Elaine Wagner
ewagner1000@yahoo.com

COMMITTEE CHAIRS & ROLES

Better Birding Skills

Sharon Tinianow (acting)
sharontinianow@gmail.com

Communications & Outreach

Patrick O'Driscoll (interim)
patodrisk@gmail.com

Conservation

Courtney Rella
dr.cawtney@gmail.com

Field Trips

David Suddjian
davidsuddjian@gmail.com

Finance

Roger Koester
koester1949@gmail.com

Grants

Elaine Wagner
EWagner1000@yahoo.com

Hawk Watch

Janet Peters
j.f.peters58@gmail.com

Membership

Cyndy Johnson
cyndyjohnson28@msn.com

Nominations

Mary Geder
mfg5000@live.com

Programs Director

Bill Turner
toursbyturner@aol.com

Historian

Kristine Haglund
kahaglund1@aol.com

Web Administrator

Jim Esten
admin@dfobirds.org

Zoom Coordinator

Peter Stoltz
dfobirds.zoom@gmail.com

DFO ONLINE

Website

dfobirds.org

Facebook Group

facebook.com/groups/dfobirds

Instagram

instagram.com/denverfieldornithologists

CONTACT

Email

dfocommsgroup@gmail.com

Via website (at bottom of home page)

dfobirds.org

US Mail

Attn: Kathy Holland, Treasurer, DFO
351 E Caley Ave, Centennial, CO 80121-2201

LEARN MORE

Membership — Join or Renew

dfobirds.org/DFO/Membership.aspx

Field Trips — Explore / Sign Up

dfobirds.org/FieldTrips.aspx

Volunteering

dfobirds.org/DFO/Volunteer.aspx

Charitable Giving

dfobirds.org/DFO/Donations.aspx

DFO Merch Store

zazzle.com/store/official_dfo_shop



FROM THE PRESIDENT

From no more room to Zoom — and beyond: Meeting together in changing times

Sharon Tinianow

DFO Membership Chair **Cyndy Johnson** recently received this question from one of our members: “*When are we going to start meeting in person again?*” Program Manager **Bill Turner** gets the same question from time to time. I imagine this may be on the minds of other DFO members, too.

Our board of directors has certainly wrestled with it over the past couple of years, as the COVID-19 shutdown — the reason we moved to meeting remotely via Zoom — continues to recede in our rear-view mirror. This is a good time to review how we got here, update you about the issue and ask again for your feedback.

For more than 50 years, DFO has held monthly meetings with program presentations of one kind or other. The first was in January 1966, shortly after the Colorado Bird Club became Denver Field Ornithologists. For most of our history, these evening gatherings were in the Denver Museum of Nature & Science. It was an ideal venue, with ample parking and seating and a central Denver location.

As technology advanced through the years, the museum’s Ricketson Auditorium became DFO’s preferred location. Presenters could operate PowerPoint slideshows from their laptops at the podium. By 2013, technology and support from DMNS staff produced high-quality audio-visuals that captured both what was onscreen and views of the speakers. DFO historian **Kris Haglund** edited and archived the videos with easy-to-click links on our website.

A few years ago, during major remodeling, the museum revised its policies for facility use by partner organizations like DFO. Our monthly cost for Ricketson increased dramatically, far beyond reach. And our permanent fourth Monday time slot there was no longer guaranteed. If a full-price client wanted the venue that night, we were bumped to other museum space lacking the same amenities.

In short, our ideal home for monthly programs was no longer available. After an extensive search, DFO relocated in January 2019 to Unity Spiritual Center Denver, just south of the University of Denver. It was a welcoming place with adequate parking and plenty of seating, but Unity lacked the same technology

to support and produce quality recordings for our archive. Slideshows — operated remotely from a sound booth, not from the podium — could become awkward and disjointed. The sound quality of our own video (recorded by DFO web administrator **Jim Esten** from the rear of the sanctuary) suffered substantially because the podium microphone no longer fed directly into the recording.

The following year, when the pandemic made meeting in person unsafe, DFO pivoted to gathering remotely via the Zoom video meeting platform. This online service not only allowed us to continue our tradition of monthly program meetings, it also allowed us to recruit presenters from out of town, out of state, and even out of the country.

Bill Turner took full advantage. After our first monthly program via Zoom with local DFO members **Chuck Hundertmark** and **Gregg Goodrich**, next up came **Kenn Kaufman**, the renowned birder and author, Zooming live from Ohio. Soon after were out-of-state presentations with prominent bird-book authors **J. Drew Latham**, **Scott Weidensaul**, **Sherri Williamson**, **Luke Patterson**, and **Richard Crossley**.

Compared with the challenging cost of bringing all those out-of-towners to Denver in person, Zoom allows us to host hundreds of attendees for zero space rental at moderate, modest annual expense. Zoom’s online recording function produces excellent quality video, too.

Monthly meeting attendance via Zoom skyrocketed. Pre-pandemic, in-person meetings typically drew 60-90 people. When Kaufman spoke via Zoom, 342 people tuned in. Subsequent monthly programs drew well over 100 attendees, some attracting nearly 300.

Zoom also made it possible for many more non-members to find out about DFO. During our pandemic shutdown, club membership grew steadily, standing now at 650 households.

In mid-2021, gathering in person became possible again. When we surveyed the membership about whether to stick with Zoom or return to in-person meetings, those who responded were split — about half for in-person and half for Zoom. Those who wanted to

Continued on page 6

meet in person again had trouble with Zoom technology or missed the social, face-to-face interaction. Zoom lovers cited the challenge of getting to evening meetings because of distance and driving at night or in bad weather.

Many respondents liked the idea of a hybrid model with a choice to attend in person or online. Returning to Unity after the pandemic, DFO tried also to stream that first meeting live via YouTube. It did not go well. Unity's technology for remote linkup had problems (and has since been abandoned). Hybrid program attendance plummeted from our pandemic-era averages. When Colorado bird sound expert **Nathan Pieplow** gave his excellent presentation in August 2022, only 25 people attended in person; just 25 others streamed online. We've learned since that DFO would need better technical expertise and equipment, the cost of which could be prohibitive.

We returned to Zoom for monthly meetings this year to continue serving more people and engaging a greater variety of presenters. At the same time, we realize that not everyone has the internet connection or technology to "attend" meetings easily this way. So, I offer a couple of solutions for you to consider:

- **Get Zoom-savvy** — Our next issue of *The Lark Bunting* will feature instructions that walk you through the steps to connect easily anytime with Zoom meetings and webinars
- **Hold a watch party** — Some attendees already gather in one household with a better internet connection and newer online viewing system to watch the DFO program together. The DFO Board can address how we might organize watch parties or help members organize their own
- **Plan other in-person events** — DFO is also experimenting with in-person, member-only events in months when we don't have program meetings. One such gathering was our Volunteer Recognition Day on June 4 at the Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR. (*See page 12 for a report on how it went.*) But we are considering more in-person gatherings in the future

Have an idea for resolving our hybrid program challenges? I'd love to hear from you. Contact me soon via email at sharontinianow@gmail.com.

We also want to hear *your* ideas for future monthly programs. Got a particular speaker in mind whom you would enjoy hearing or a topic about which you are curious? Have thoughts about in-person gatherings you'd like DFO to provide, or ideas to make our monthly programs more accessible? **Look for a DFO survey coming to your email inbox in mid-June.**

Happy birding, everyone!

Sharon Tinianow, who joined DFO in 2016, was elected club president in April 2023. A former editor of *The Lark Bunting*, she began birding in an ornithology class in college. Sharon retired as assistant director of CU Boulder's Museum of Natural History.



See you in September . . .

As is our summer custom, with the publication of this issue, *The Lark Bunting* is on mid-season hiatus, aka summer break. This month's newsletter combines the July and August issues. We'll return in mid-August with the September issue, as DFO's autumn schedule of monthly programs begins and we're all scanning the skies for fall migration.

As we ask whenever we take these semi-annual breaks in summer and winter: What else would YOU like to see in the pages of your DFO newsletter? Tell us your suggestions. Send your contributions, critiques and questions. Send your birding photos, too! We LOVE good shots of the birds, and so do readers!

Drop me an email at patodrisk@gmail.com or call me at 303-885-6955. I'm all ears.

Happy summer, and thank you for continuing to read *The Lark Bunting* as we bring you more words about birds from DFO!

DFO News Notes

Got blurbs on birds? Share with **DFO News Notes**: Colorado birding newsbits, eBird milestones, tales from the trail, birding life (and life birds!), etc. Send items, photos and any questions to newsletter editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com.

BIRD BOMBS, MY LITTLE PRETTY! “I’M MOLTING” ON JULY 20

In advance of autumn (*already?*), the addition of a midsummer BIRB BOMBS session is just the thing to prep for when many bird species trade in their old feathers for new ones. Yes, the July 20 installment in DFO’s continuing series of mini-webinars on bird identification is “**I’m Molting**” — an opportunity to learn the basics of feather molt. Why, what and when? Series creator and host **David Suddjian**, who is also DFO’s Field Trip chair, will have answers in this quick (30-40 minutes) dive into something most of us notice — but few of us know much about. That’s **Thursday, July 20, 7 p.m. MDT via Zoom**. To register, [click here](#).

R.I.P.: DFO MEMBER AND FRIEND JAN GORSKI (1959-2023)

Janet Louise “Jan” Gorski — global traveler (all seven continents), accomplished photographer, passionate hiker and DFO field tripper, gifted gardener and native plant whiz, and avid reader with a wide range of other pursuits — died May 13 in Colorado at age 64. Born Jan. 22, 1959 in Harvey, IL, Jan grew up to earn a degree in computer science with a minor in math. Until retirement, she pursued a career in systems engineering and worked for several major companies, including Martin Marietta, Hughes Aircraft, Advanced Systems Engineering, CIBER, and Scitor Corp. She lived in Highlands Ranch and was a member of DFO since 2017.

Family and a wide circle of friends remember Jan for her exceptional photography of far-flung travels (“images” was part of her email address), bird-and-wildflower hikes, and her fascination with archaeology and prehistoric rock art. She deepened her involvement in local Colorado birding upon retirement, well after her eBird life list began to fill with international species (her life’s tally of more than 1,300 species includes more than three times as many abroad as

she recorded in Colorado and the US). Jan took up birding “casually” 30 years ago in Africa on a volunteer photography mission with many other photographers to promote tourism. That detail is one of many she left in this [insightful, first-person glimpse](#) of her life’s birding path, published by eBird after it randomly selected Gorski as its “eBirder of the Month” for June 2021.

A frequent and enthusiastic participant on DFO field trips, “Jan was a good person, and had a lot of plant knowledge on all the DFO walks,” said **Cyndy Johnson**, the club’s Membership chair. Among numerous tribute comments on Jan’s Facebook page, one friend remarked: “Jan lived dreams some of us never knew existed.” Her family asked that in lieu of flowers, mourners consider donations in Jan’s memory to The Nature Conservancy, Wildlife Conservation Society, or Global Fund for Women. Read her full obituary here on the [Natural Funeral website](#).



BELATEDLY, A NEW DFO VICE PRESIDENT

As we reported here this spring, DFO’s annual election of new officers and board members in April had no candidate for vice president. But not long after our online election, DFO member **Matt Rodgers** of Centennial volunteered to fill the vacancy. After discussing it with DFO Nominations chair **Mary Geder**, Rodgers “attended” the DFO Board of Directors’ quarterly meeting online May 22. After hearing more from him, the board voted unanimously to appoint Matt interim vice president. He’ll hold office through next April, when he can formally stand for election by the DFO membership.

Continued on page 8



Matt Rodgers

A DFO member since 2018, Rodgers grew up “imprinted” on the woods of his native northwest Pennsylvania. He says his “passion for nature continues to grow,” with conservation interests that cover the spectrum: hunting (especially waterfowl), fishing, birdwatching,

landscaping his house for birds and pollinators, and “just doing my best St. Francis impersonation every time I step outside.”

A Colorado resident for more than three decades, Matt earned a degree in engineering from Colorado State University. He now works as the civilian manager of all environmental programs at [Buckley Space Force Base](#) in Aurora (formerly Buckley Air Force Base). Rodgers says he hopes to bring to DFO his diverse background, interests and passion for birds while building bridges among “as many groups as possible for the betterment of birds.”

SPEAKING OF CONSERVATION . . .

Courtney Rella of Lafayette, elected in April to the DFO Board, has agreed to become chair of the club’s Conservation Committee. Since moving to Colorado in 2021, she has volunteered extensively for birds and wildlife, including in raptor education, wildland restoration, and seasonal bird monitoring (Bald Eagle Watch, Hawk Watch). She also has helped Colorado Parks & Wildlife collect reports of birds sick or dead of avian flu. If you have thoughts or ideas about conservation topics you think DFO should pursue, contact Rella at dr.cawtney@gmail.com.

SPEAKING OF BIRD FLU . . .

Literally and figuratively, the endangered California Condor may be the biggest victim of avian influenza. The huge vulture, North America’s largest land bird (9½-foot wingspan), is also among the continent’s rarest, totaling fewer than 600 birds. So wildlife conservationists are alarmed that since March more

than 20 condors have died of the virus. The species apparently is “highly susceptible,” a veterinarian at the Oregon Zoo told *The New York Times*. So in mid-May, federal wildlife agencies [authorized emergency use](#) of an avian flu vaccine on the birds, which are native to California and have been successfully reintroduced to prehistorical habitat in Arizona and Utah, where the first flu death was confirmed in March.

According to [US Fish & Wildlife Service](#), 21 condors, including members of eight breeding pairs, have died. Read more about efforts to save the species from further flu mortality in this [New York Times article](#) from mid-May.



A Californian Condor in flight,
Zion National Park, Utah
Phil Armitage / Wikipedia



WORKSHOPS

DFO skills workshops return! “Bird Habitats of the Front Range” in July

Thursday, July 27

7–8:30 p.m. MDT via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

Veteran birders know that bird identification in the field is about more than just shape, color and all the physical and behavioral field marks of this species or that. Why, for instance, is *that* bird here, right now, in this particular place?

DFO Better Birding Skills workshops return this summer with a workshop well-suited to answering that question for birders within our club’s traditional field tripping territory: ***Bird Habitats of the Front Range***.

This July 27 evening workshop (7-8:30 p.m. MDT via Zoom) is a collaboration between DFO and Colorado Parks & Wildlife. In a departure from the usual Better Birding Skills format of “classroom session followed by field session,” this workshop will be online — and it is scheduled to follow DFO’s spring and early summer season of field trips.

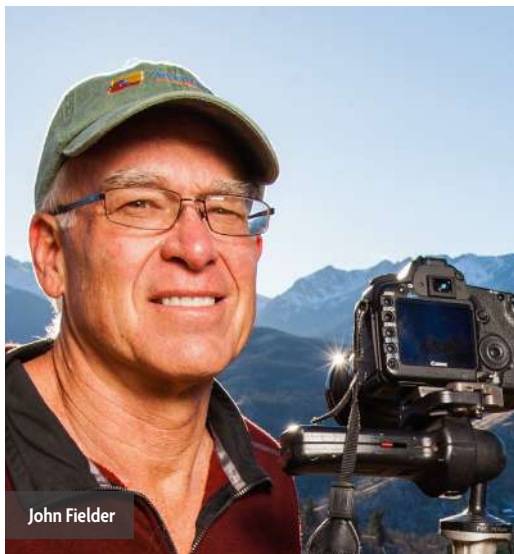
Free of charge and open to all, this workshop aims to help you improve your ability to identify bird species in the field through a deeper understanding of the habitats they encounter in the zones where the foothills of the Rockies meet Colorado’s eastern Plains. The workshop is geared towards developing birders who have some field experience and want to learn about the birds they can expect to find along this swath of neighboring high country and flatlands terrain. All participants will receive a set of resources to extend their learning after the workshop, including websites, book lists and documents outlining habitats and birds found there.

Workshop instructors include several veteran DFO field trip leaders — **Karen Drozda, Chuck Hundertmark, Mary Geder, Tina Jones, Peter Ruprecht** and **Susan Blansett** — and **Mary McCormac**, CPW’s statewide coordinator of Interpretation and Wildlife Viewing.

To attend, you must register in advance. After registering, you will receive a confirmation email with details about how to join the webinar.

If you have questions about the workshop, contact **Sharon Tinianow** at sharontinianow@gmail.com.





FALL PROGRAM PREVIEW

Retrospective: Changing Colorado Landscapes, 1973–2023

John Fielder

Monday, August 28

7 p.m. MST via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

As DFO heads into nesting season, we're also in our traditional summer break from our free monthly evening programs. But on the horizon for our autumn program series is a special evening with famed Colorado landscape photographer **John Fielder**.

Mark your calendar now for “Retrospective: Changing Colorado Landscapes, 1973 –2023” on **Monday, Aug. 28, 7 p.m.** via Zoom. Fielder’s slide show with commentary, photographs and music will celebrate his 50 years of exploring and photographing the state. Fielder plans to discuss “the physical changes in the Colorado landscape and patterns of its use by people, including good and bad, in our effort to protect the state’s remaining ecosystems.”

Fielder’s exquisite wilderness images and landscapes need no introduction. They are so thoroughly identified with Colorado that it’s even his “brand” in books and calendars, fine art prints, photography workshops and online: [John Fielder’s Colorado](#). The presence and visibility of his works have made Fielder an important player for decades on the Colorado nature scene.

He was also in the news recently with the announcement that he will donate his photographic life’s work to [History Colorado](#), official caretaker agency for the state’s collective historical memory. Fielder’s living bequest includes more than 7,500 photos (“distilled from 200,000 made since 1973”), “important artifacts” (photography equipment, books, papers and “oral histories about life on the wilderness trail”) and other “photography paraphernalia.” History Colorado will make the images available online this spring for “free digital searches, for personal and commercial use by the general public,” and it will host ongoing exhibitions of Fielder’s work beginning this summer.

It is a bittersweet moment for Fielder, 72, who in an interview with *The Denver Post* in May revealed he is dealing with pancreatic cancer. “No matter what happens to me in the next six months,” he told his interviewer, “my photos are there at History Colorado.”



Muleshoe Bend,
Dolores River Canyon WSA
John Fielder

FALL PROGRAM PREVIEW



Tami Bulow



Altamira Oriole
Tami Bulow

Birding the Lower Rio Grande Valley: Top 5 Hotspots and More

Tamie Bulow
Monday, October 23
7 p.m. MST via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

A birding adventure to deep South Texas can be one of the most exhilarating and rewarding trips in the continental US. Owing to its famous, border-defining river, the Lower Rio Grande Valley actually lies farther south than one-third of Mexico. That accident of political geography offers the opportunity to find vagrant bird rarities from Mexico on a regular basis, as well as the more than 500 species of birds that migrate seasonally through the area or call it home.

Former DFO president **Tamie Bulow** (2005-2007) calls it home, too. Before moving to the Lower Rio Grande Valley to manage the South Padre Island Birding & Nature Center, she worked as manager of conferences, conventions and tours for Colorado-based [American Birding Association](#). Now retired, Bulow lives in the border city of Harlingen, TX but continues to dabble in birding work.

In her free evening presentation, “Birding the Lower Rio Grande Valley: Top 5 Hotspots and More,” Bulow says she will reveal “five places that are a must visit” for birders, “and another 30 or 40 that won’t disappoint.” She also says there are “15-20 specialties that you must come to the Rio Grande Valley for if you want them on your North American List.” Birds like Great Kiskadee and Green Jay, Buff-bellied Hummingbird and Altamira Oriole, Grove-billed Ani and Green Kingfisher.

Bulow has more advice: “Spring migration is best, but a mild winter can’t be beat for delightful birding. Top tip: Avoid summer. You will thank me later.”

Although she born in Boston, Bulow’s family moved around — Connecticut, Denver, Richmond, Atlanta. “Twelve schools in

12 years,” she says. “Mom was a backyard birder, so I grew up filling feeders and calling out birds that were feeding there. When I got my first house, the first thing I did was hang a bird feeder, and then chuckled to myself, ‘I must be a birder!’ ”

She returned to Colorado as a student at the University of Denver and worked after graduation at local ice arenas, managing the DU Arena and its youth sports program. Later, her travel as a sales rep for skate maker Riedell Skates “fed my birding addiction.”

Still later, a transfer to Albuquerque led her to start “Thursday Birders” there — like Denver’s own Tuesday Birders weekly meetup. She would become president of Central New Mexico Audubon Society and VP of the state Audubon organization. She says that prepared her to be DFO president after she moved back to Denver.

Left jobless after years with ABA, she applied to be director of South Padre Island Birding & Nature Center in Texas and landed the job. During her years in south Texas, she also managed nature tourism for Chambers County east of Houston and as executive director of the Texas Tropical Trail region for the Texas Historical Commission.

Today she writes grants for Space Coast Birding & Wildlife Festival (Port Canaveral, FL), “But basically I am retired,” she says, though she does “some bird guiding” at local festivals and privately, and volunteers for the Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival. A Texas Master Naturalist, she is working on learning the butterflies and plants of the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

Rainy out, warm within: Celebrating DFO volunteers with food, awards . . . and owls!

On a soggy Sunday, June 4, more than 40 DFO members splashed out to Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge to celebrate the people without whom Denver Field Ornithologists would not exist: VOLUNTEERS!

While steady rain waterlogged the habitat outside, attendees at DFO's first Volunteer Appreciation Day in the refuge's visitor center were warm, dry and thankful it wasn't a picnic. They shared food, friendship and recognition to applaud the dedication and longevity of those who make DFO go: field trip leaders, committee members, web wizards, social media mavens, tech gurus, club officers, board members and more.



Caliban the Barn Owl



David Suddjian receiving Peregrine Award

Continued on page 13



Joey Kellner enjoying a muffin



Mary Driscoll receiving Meadowlark Award

VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION *cont from page 12*

Singled out for special note were four recipients of two new awards that recognize volunteer excellence. **Susan Blansett**, DFO immediate past president and emcee for the event, presented the first Meadowlark Awards for behind-the-scenes work by “unsung heroes” who labor in relative anonymity. **Kris Haglund** was honored as DFO’s longtime historian and archivist. **Mary Driscoll** was applauded for her years of managing DFO’s eBird account and entering its voluminous data record onto the club website.

DFO President **Sharon Tinianow** then presented the inaugural Peregrine Awards for “extraordinary innovation and leadership” to two DFO veterans for taking their areas of volunteer responsibility “to new heights.”

David Suddjian, DFO Field Trip chair, was cited for his relentless, groundbreaking work to increase the breadth and depth of trip offerings, infuse trip leader ranks with new talent, and reinvigorate the club’s solid cadre of veteran leaders. Tinianow also noted Suddjian’s successful “Bird Bombs” series of field identification mini-webinars. After more than a year (and counting) of monthly live installments via Zoom, the series lives on at the DFO website as a [living archive of short, information-packed recordings](#) about avian ID essentials, accessible anytime at the click of your device.

Patrick O’Driscoll, editor of *The Lark Bunting*, was cited for tireless and transformative work on the DFO newsletter since succeeding Tinianow as editor in 2020.

The morning-long event concluded with up-close appreciation of four beautiful raptors, courtesy of [Nature’s Educators](#), the Florence, CO-based wildlife and conservation program. Presenters **Alex Olow** and **Abby Batulis** showed off **Thistle** the Eastern Screech Owl, **Caliban** the Barn Owl, **Echo** the Great Horned Owl and **Slater** the Eurasian Eagle-Owl (a lookalike cousin of Great Horned Owl). The raptor handlers also fielded questions and delivered volumes of species info, trivia and lore, some of which stumped even a roomful of devoted birders.

Tinianow thanked Blansett for arranging the awards and board member **Cyndy Johnson** for organizing the food: “What a great volunteer effort!”

Speaking of which: Come join DFO’s volunteer corps, won’t you? ([Click here for how](#)) The club can use your hands, hearts, spirit and expertise. Then next year, you can join in the SECOND annual Volunteer Appreciation Day, when we will celebrate YOU!

Photos by Patrick O’Driscoll

Continued on page 14



Members mingling at event



Sharon Tinianow, VP Matt Rodgers and Membership chair Cyndy Johnson



Past presidents Susan Blansett and Dave Hill



President Sharon Tinianow and Treasurer Kathy Holland



Jim Esten recording the proceedings



Kris Haglund received Meadowlark Award from Susan Blansett



Thistle the Eastern Screech Owl

CONSERVATION

Hawk Watch 2023: Wet and windy on the ridge, but the results were hot

Mike Fernandez and Janet Peters

The 2023 spring [DFO Hawk Watch](#) migration count on Dinosaur Ridge was remarkable in many ways, from record-high counts for three hawk species, an extended season, and a tangle with a wildfire that temporarily pushed us down but not out.

For the first time, DFO extended the 10-week count season to 11 weeks (March 1 through May 14). It was a wise move: We added another 106 migrating raptors, despite losing a full day that final week to a strong spring storm on Dinosaur Ridge, the Jefferson County observation post where we count birds of prey moving north after winter.

The 2023 count totaled 2,320 migrant raptors, second highest since 2005 (2,825) and slightly below last year (2,406). The Hawk Watch team attributes the slight downturn this year to fewer Red-tailed Hawks, still perennially the most numerous species we see.

Three species registered all-time highs on the ridge. This year's star: Broad-winged Hawk, with a record 170 birds counted, more than three times the 2022 result (54) and 1-1/2 times the previous high. Broad-wingeds had appeared to be in decline for years at Dinosaur Ridge. We hope this encouraging result can repeat in the coming years.

Swainson's Hawk also marked a high with 77 birds, 23 more than 2022's record-setting count. This year was the highest for Ferruginous Hawk, too, with 65 birds, thanks to an unexpected late push north at season's end.

DFO shares these annual observations with Hawk Migration Association of North America (HMANA), a conservation nonprofit that monitors the seasonal movement of hawks, eagles, falcons and other raptors at points across the continent each spring and fall. HMANA's [Raptor Population Index Project](#) provides trend data. You can find all of DFO's count data — by year, month, date and species — at HMANA's [HawkCount webpage](#) for Dinosaur Ridge.

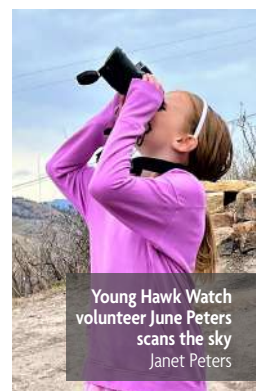
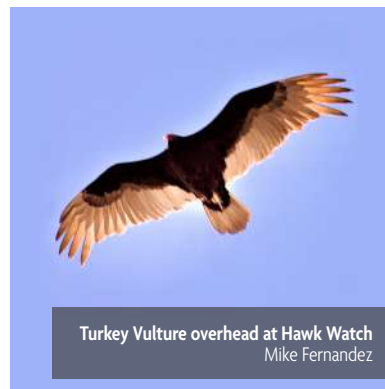
As a vital community science project, DFO Hawk Watch not only monitors raptor migration here along the Front Range, it also trains participants in identification of these magnificent birds of prey.

“Riley & The Mile High Raptors,” DFO's team in HMANA's annual one-day [Raptorthon fundraiser](#), brought in a total of \$1,660 on April 16, to be split between DFO and the association.

One other event challenged us in every way this season: the Hogback Fire in early April (*see story in The Lark Bunting's previous issue, [June 2023, page 12](#)*). That ridgeside wildfire consumed much of the area around and within inches of our observation platform. All Hawk Watch personnel came through safely, but unfortunately, the blaze kept us off Dinosaur Ridge for several days.

Emma Riley, DFO's full-time Hawk Watch count leader for the second year, concluded the season this way: “I have been saying this all season, but it needs to be said again — thank you to everyone who has made this season run efficiently and brought skill, passion and great company to the count. We could not do it without the help of our DFO volunteers. We will see you next spring, and happy birding in the meantime!”

Mike Fernandez is assistant editor of *The Lark Bunting*.
Janet Peters is Hawk Watch Committee chair for DFO.



Chico Basin: Birding lease details jell as pitch for next ranch operator goes public

Patrick O'Driscoll

As expected, the likely lease for birding access to state-owned Chico Basin Ranch beginning in 2025 will severely limit our pastime in one of the richest birdlife locales in Colorado.

[Aiken Audubon](#), the Colorado Springs chapter of National Audubon, outlined details of a tentative birding lease at the 86,000-acre ranch in El Paso and Pueblo counties in its May newsletter. The starkest change to the current visit-anytime policy is how seldom birders will be allowed on the property after 2024: Just 10 weeks total per year (during spring and fall migration), from early morning to midday only, for a limit of 20 birders a day. That's 42 fewer weeks — 80 percent less availability for birding — than was possible annually over the past two-plus decades.

As the closest bird-related organization to the ranch, Aiken Audubon has been discussing the fate of Chico Basin birding with the [Colorado State Land Board](#) for months. Operating as a land trust, the land board manages a portfolio of ranches and other public properties, which it leases out to generate income for public schools across the state.

The board's rationale for severely reducing Chico Basin access by birders — to minimize conflicts with ranch operations — is questionable at best. Both birders and the current leaseholder say no such conflicts have ever occurred. Nevertheless, the board issued a formal "[request for proposals](#)" (RFP for short) in early May that separates management of ranching from birding, hospitality and other non-agriculture activities under individual leases.

The current, all-encompassing lease on Chico Basin Ranch — held since 1999 by [Ranchlands](#), a family-owned, multistate, birding-friendly enterprise based at Chico — expires at the end of next year. For 2025 and beyond, the land board seeks to reassert direct control over every use on its property by issuing not one but multiple, separate, 10-year leases, including a "recreational" one for birding.

A [73-page online packet](#) of property details, maps, photos, lease conditions and application forms states the board will accept proposals from prospective lessees (including current operator Ranchlands) through July 27. It intends to award the new ranching/agriculture lease by November, more than a year before it takes effect. Day-long "mandatory" tours of the ranch for all lease bidders are scheduled for June 20 and 21. The other leases up for bid cover ranch tourism ("hospitality") and three separate recreation endeavors: hunting/fishing, birding and the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies' (BCR) spring/fall banding station onsite.

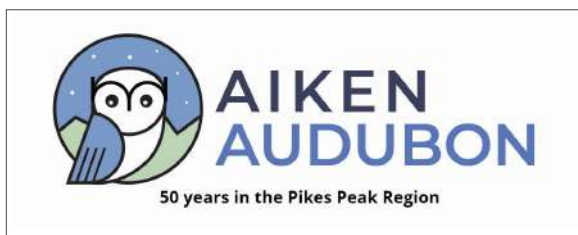
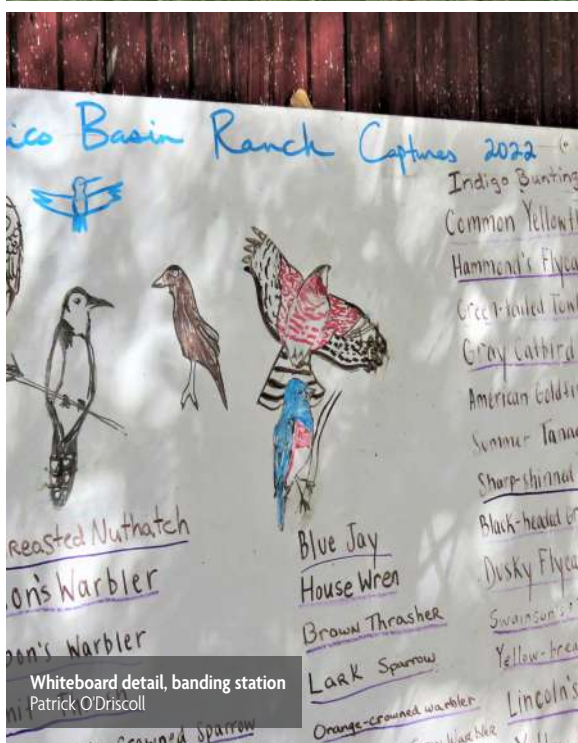


Ranch headquarters
Patrick O'Driscoll



Lark Sparrow
Jim Esten

Continued on page 17



CHICO BASIN *cont from page 16*

Shortly before the RFP posting, board staff and Aiken Audubon reached tentative accord on a birding lease. Aiken conservation chair **Linda Hodges**, who led negotiations, outlined details in the [club newsletter](#). She reported that Aiken “is not yet under contract . . . but this is what we expect access to look like beginning in 2025:

- “Access will be limited to 10 weeks of the year, during spring and summer migration, to coincide with Bird Conservancy of the Rockies’ banding period.
- “There will be a limit of 20 birders/day, and birders will need to register and pay ahead of time.
- “Visiting hours to the ranch will be from 7 a.m. to 1 p.m., or 6 a.m. to noon . . . still to be determined.
- “We’ll have access to the banding station, HQ (ranch headquarters) and Rose Pond . . . (with) 3 designated parking locations.”

In addition, Aiken would have to “provide one volunteer to BCR whenever a school group visits” and share “half of our gross proceeds (with) BCR.” Aiken, to whom both DFO and Colorado Field Ornithologists have pledged support, also must carry liability insurance and “be responsible for signage, any road or other damage, possibly gates, etc.”

Seeking a silver lining, Hodges noted: “On the bright side, the (land board) isn’t charging us a lease fee, which is a huge plus. Keep in mind that there will be no financial gain to (the land board) for allowing us on the ranch, so this is actually a generous proposition.”

Over the years, Chico Basin has become a popular destination for birders, including several DFO field trips a year that quickly fill up whenever posted. More than 350 species have been recorded there, and the recently concluded spring migration saw a robust array of warblers and other migrants and rarities prized by birders. Birding visitation and the banding station have contributed substantially to ornithological data, education and understanding of the ranch’s birdlife for years. Collectively, birders have recorded well over 9,500 eBird checklists for the ranch’s eight hotspots (only three of which may be accessible after 2024).

The loss of year-round birding could complicate another scientific effort: the annual Colorado Breeding Bird Survey in June, which is outside the limited time windows of spring/fall access after 2024. Aiken Audubon members normally visit then to do their part in the decades-old assessment of nesting bird populations statewide.

For now, Ranchlands’ no-hassle policy for birding visitors is expected to continue until the new ranch lease takes effect in January 2025. That means about 18 more months of self-service bliss: Drive in, sign in, leave a modest \$10 to \$15-a-head fee at the rustic kiosk outside ranch headquarters — and go birding.

CONSERVATION

CU Boulder chickadee research focuses where Black-cappeds, Mountains mix on Front Range

Editor's note: Recipients of annual grants from DFO's [Research, Conservation & Education Grant Fund](#) report back to our membership with presentations at monthly program meetings, field trips at research sites, or articles in The Lark Bunting. This article is an overview of ongoing, grant-supported research at the University of Colorado Boulder.

The Boulder Chickadee Study: quantifying hybridization between black-capped and mountain chickadees along the Front Range

The Taylor Lab, University of Colorado Boulder, Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology
Scott Taylor, associate professor; **Mia Larrieu**, MA; **Kathryn Grabenstein**, PhD; **Angela Theodosopoulos**, PhD

Scott Taylor

Many of us in North America are familiar with chickadees. These gregarious backyard birds are common visitors to feeders. Being non-migratory, they also spend their winters with us. For most of us, the neighborhood species is the Black-capped Chickadee (*Poecile atricapillus*). With the broadest distribution of any chickadee species in North America (southern Appalachians to Alaska), the Black-capped is among the most recognizable birds on the continent and appears to be the most likely chickadee to thrive in towns and cities. It's even the state bird of Maine and Massachusetts.

Where Black-capped Chickadees overlap with other chickadee species, they sometimes hybridize. Hybrids have fascinated humans for millennia. Think of a [gryphon](#) (aka griffin), [centaur](#), or [pegacorn](#) (winged unicorn or Pegasus). Although those are hybrids of human myth and legend, real hybrids often form in nature. Think, for instance, of the mule, a (usually sterile) crossbreed of horse and donkey.

In eastern North America, Black-capped and Carolina chickadees frequently hybridize at the northern range limit of the Carolina, and their joint offspring can survive and reproduce. This narrow hybrid zone is moving rapidly north in response to warming winter temperatures. Some recent studies have found that Black-capped/Carolina hybrids might have trouble staying warm in the winter for two reasons: impaired metabolic functions and impaired spatial cognition, i.e., how they try to remember where they hid the seeds they need to eat during winter. Our lab is working on both these questions.

Here in Colorado, our other (sometimes) neighborhood chickadee is the Mountain Chickadee (*Poecile gambeli*). As its name suggests, this species is a bird of montane to alpine forests and can be found throughout western North America. Because Mountain and Black-capped chickadees are not one another's closest relatives, scientists long assumed they only hybridize rarely.

But recently, **Kathryn Grabenstein** began work (with support from DFO) on this question, trying to understand the pattern of hybridization between the two species. After she studied the genomes of nearly 500 chickadees from across the continent (none of which looked like a hybrid), her results were published in the journal *Global Change Biology*. She found a strong correlation between human habitat disturbances and where Black-capped/Mountain hybrids occur. Although we do not understand why these chickadees hybridize in habitats disturbed by people, one of the places with many such hybrids is Colorado's Front Range.



Black-capped and Mountain chickadees
Georgy Semenov

Continued on page 19

In 2018, when she was a new PhD student, Grabenstein and I established the [Boulder Chickadee Study](#) to monitor breeding of Black-capped and Mountain chickadees in Boulder County. Now in its fifth year, our study involves more than 400 nest boxes distributed from inside the Boulder city limits and upslope to the CU Boulder Mountain Research Station. We have banded and blood-sampled nearly 1,000 individuals. Here in Boulder County, we think this hybridizing has something to do with urban forests; we humans like to plant deciduous trees that wouldn't otherwise be here. It will take many years to figure this out. But from our most recent whole genome data from 430 chickadees sampled, every single chickadee in Boulder County, whether it looks like a Black-capped or a Mountain, has at least a tiny fraction of the other species' DNA.

It seems that hybridization between the two is much more frequent than anyone thought, and that this can affect greatly the genetics of chickadee populations in areas where crossbreeding occurs most frequently. We don't know yet what this means for our local chickadees, but we're currently pursuing many new and exciting angles of research. Our lab very much appreciates Denver Field Ornithologists' support, and we look forward to sharing another update with you from the Boulder Chickadee Study in the near future.



Scott Taylor, a naturalist since childhood in southwestern Ontario, is an associate professor in the CU Boulder Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology. He is principal investigator at the Taylor Lab and director of the [CU Boulder Mountain Research Station](#)



Black-capped chickadees
Jim Esten

Welcome to new DFO members

Douglas Bridwell of Littleton; Ruth Craven, Aurora; Jana Everett, Denver; Nancy Finnegan, Parker; Bailey Parkhouse, Denver; Scott and Peg Roen, Parker; Emily Scheler, Denver, and Rebecca Shattuck, Denver

Thank you for your contribution

Research, Education and Conservation Grants Fund

Heather Blackie Davis and Heather Davis, and Jana Everett

Friends of DFO

Emily Scheler

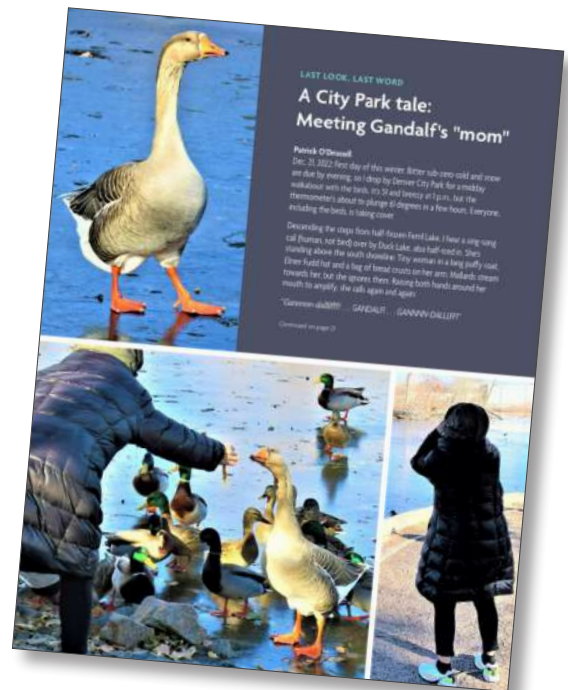


“Uncle” Gandalf? Denver City Park’s oldest resident goose . . . *babysits!*

Patrick O’Driscoll

Three months ago, we introduced readers of *The Lark Bunting* to two unusual creatures: **Gandalf**, a huge domestic goose that lives in Denver City Park, and **Kim Marolt**, 83, the feisty Korean immigrant who incubated, hatched and reared him and his brother **Randolph** until they outgrew her Aurora backyard.

Kim’s twin domestic Ganders became instant City Park fixtures after she left them in the park 14 years ago. But she didn’t quite abandon them. Nearly every evening since, Kim has returned to feed bread crusts to her boys — though just to Gandalf now; Randolph vanished from the park in spring of last year.



Continued on page 21



Gandalf with adoptive mom Kim
and his adopted goose family
Patrick O’Driscoll



Babysitter with Canada goslings
Patrick O'Driscoll

GANDALF *cont from page 20*

Fast-forward to this spring. On May 30, Kim arrived in the park an hour or so before sunset, as usual, with a bag of bread scraps. Heading toward Ferril Lake, she saw a cluster of about three dozen geese, grazing near the southeast shore. She easily picked out hefty Gandalf, whose plus size, tan-brown plumage and bright orange bill, legs and feet set him apart from the Canadas.

“GANDALF! *Gandy!*” she shouted, stepping off the paved path. Munching grass, the big goose knew her voice and raised his head. But Kim stopped calling when she saw what was at Gandalf’s feet: two fuzzy yellow Canada Goose goslings, nipping at the vegetation as their parents grazed close by.

Wherever the babies moved, Gandalf followed, clearly unthreatening to the parents. But if any other goose came near, he challenged it with eyes set, neck outstretched, and a hiss on his beak. When the goose family waddled down to the water, Gandalf closely brought up the rear as they swam off together.

Who knew City Park’s most ineligible bachelor bird had a soft spot for someone else’s toddlers? “Mother Goose” Kim, that’s who.

“I think he thinks it’s his duty to protect them,” she said, having witnessed similar behavior last year. “Gandalf, he was in the water, surrounded by seven of them, baby geese. It’s not even his child, but for whatever reason, he wants to take care.”

Last year he was just Gandalf — but today, we hereby dub him “Uncle Gandalf, Guardian of Goslings.”



Gandalf with adopted goose family
Patrick O'Driscoll



Moving to protect goslings
Patrick O'Driscoll



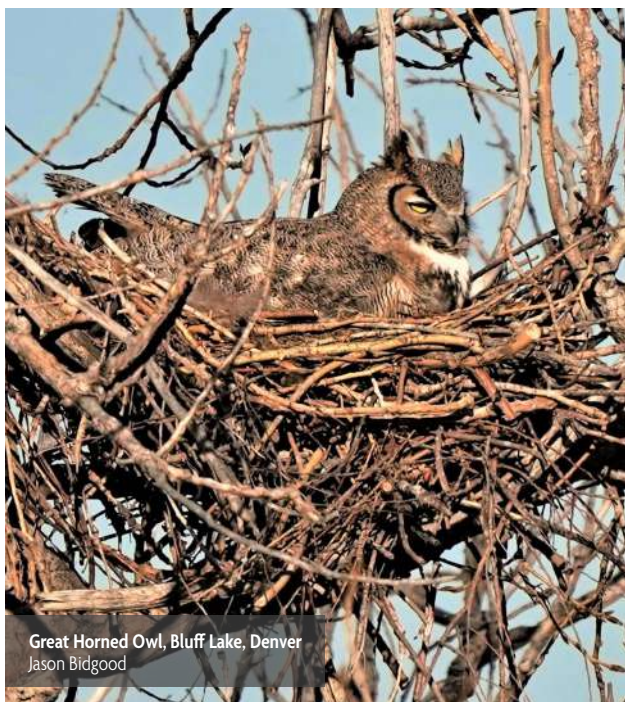
Grazing close by the babies
Patrick O'Driscoll

LAST LOOK, LAST WORD

Safe at home . . . and gone too soon



Golden Eagles, Granada, CO
Bob Stocker



Great Horned Owl, Bluff Lake, Denver
Jason Bidgood



White-breasted Nuthatch, Rosita, CO
Jim Esten



Pied-billed Grebe, Arapahoe NWR, North Park, CO
Bob Stocker

LAST LOOK, LAST WORD *cont from page 22*

Patrick O'Driscoll

Peak spring migration is over.
Mother's Day has passed.
Summer awaits.

But avian mothering (fathering, too) goes on in nests of every imaginable shape, size and material. Our wild birds are producing new generations — incubating, hatching, growing and fledging before our eyes . . . if we can see them.

Countless nests escape easy viewing this time of year as we make our birding rounds — into the backyard, around lakes and marshes, along streams and roadsides, across meadows and parking lots, past thickets and through woods, up hillsides, down canyons.

But with careful eyes and lenses, sometimes we're sharp enough (or lucky enough) to spot them. In glimpses of delight and wonder, we capture birds in their nests — through our binoculars, on our cameras, in our memories.

Enjoy these visual moments of nesting season from fellow DFO photographers. Be they parents on eggs, chicks begging for food, or nestlings about to fledge, we know the occupants of these nurseries will be gone soon enough. As the saying goes:

***A bird is safe in its nest —
but that is not
what its wings are made for***

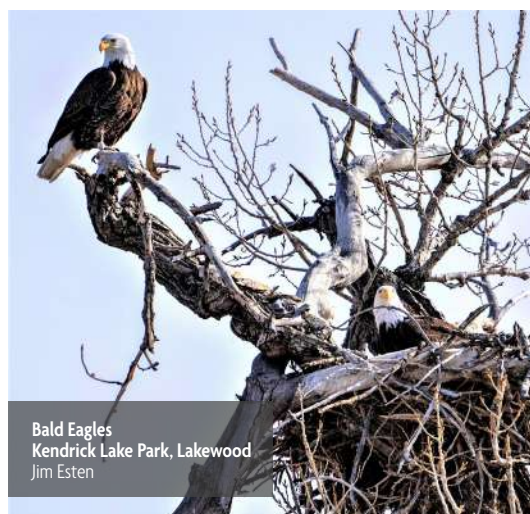
— Amit Ray



American Robins, Karval, CO
Bob Stocker



Broad-tailed Hummingbird,
lower White Ranch Park, JeffCo
Jim Esten



Bald Eagles
Kendrick Lake Park, Lakewood
Jim Esten



Brown Thrasher, Barr Lake SP
Dave Prentice

A photograph of two Double-crested Cormorants perched on a nest made of dry sticks and twigs. The birds are facing away from the camera, with their heads turned back and their long, sharp beaks open in a call. They have dark, sleek feathers and a distinctive crest of long, thin feathers on their heads. The background is a clear, bright blue sky.

Until the next Lark Bunting . . .
**GOOD SUMMER
BIRDING!**

Double-crested Cormorants,
Belmar Park, Lakewood
Bob Stocker



THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 59 | ISSUE 09 | SEPTEMBER 2023

DFOBIRDS.ORG

FALL PROGRAMS

From Rockies to Texas
to Everglades and back

PAGE 9

DFO MEMORIES

Reliving his first DFO
outing, 50 years later

PAGE 22

IN MEMORIAM

Remembering DFO
stalwarts Patty, Allison

PAGE 14

LAST LOOK, LAST WORD

12 days field tripping
In AZ's Sky Islands

PAGE 27



Mexican Spotted Owl
Pinery Canyon, Cochise County, AZ
Rob Raker



Robert Raker, a DFO member since 2014, is a former

environmental scientist, adventurer and filmmaker on many expeditions around the world. Now retired, he enjoys birding and photography and still goes rock-climbing and skiing.

ON THE COVER

Mexican Spotted Owl: Seldom-seen until a recent DFO trip . . . to Arizona

That amazing creature on the front of this month's issue of *The Lark Bunting* is a species recorded only 10 times in Colorado since the first in 1873. The last time was 30 years ago near Beulah in Pueblo County.

So there'd be no reason to put a Mexican Spotted Owl (*Strix occidentalis lucida*) on our cover now except that a DFO field trip saw this one — not here, but in a rugged canyon of ponderosa pine and scorpions in Arizona's Chiricahua Mountains. The eight birders who found the rarity (on their second try) were just four days into an epic, 12-day excursion in May led by DFO veteran **Joey Kellner** to the bird-rich "Sky Islands" of southeastern Arizona. "When it swooped in and landed no more than 30 feet from our parked cars," recalled participant **Michelle Trotter**, "it was thrilling, to say the least" — a trip highlight for all.

When you finish reading this brief species backgrounder, scroll to the end of the newsletter (page 27) for Kellner's compelling account of this longest DFO trip in recent memory (and maybe ever). It's illustrated with more beautiful bird photos by Trotter, **Patricia Cullen** and this month's cover photographer, **Rob Raker**.

Back to our cover bird: Those eyes! Liquid, dark, bottomless — shuttered windows, no glimpse to the soul there. But what a symbol of the beautiful, mysterious, primeval landscape that the species inhabits in the Southwest and Mexico.

The Mexican is one of three subspecies of spotted owl (with Northern and California), all declared "threatened" under the Endangered Species Act. The Northern is best-known, the poster bird for decades of fierce political strife over logging and old-growth forests in the Pacific Northwest. Competition from the larger Barred Owl also imperils the Northern's numbers and range. Timber, climate change and the rise of catastrophic wildland fires threaten the Mexican and California the most. But all three rate the "uncommon" description everywhere in their far-flung ranges across the West.

Cornell's *Birds of the World* tells us that the Mexican, least-studied of the three, is also a bit smaller and the lightest brown in color. But spotted owls are still larger than all but four of the 19 kinds of owl known in the US (after Great Gray, Snowy, Great Horned and Barred). Woodrats (packrats) compose most of the Mexican Spotted's diet, though mice, voles, rabbits, reptiles and bats are sometimes on the menu.

The last time anyone tried to count Mexican Spotted Owls three decades ago, they estimated roughly 1,500-2,000 in the US (and fewer in Mexico). They nest mostly in trees but also in caves and on cliff ledges in steep canyons. Though relatively long-lived (15 years is average), individuals may not breed every year.

Fun fact: This species means business with humans. Researchers trying to briefly capture fledged young have reported being attacked about the head and body by Mexican Spotted Owl parents, with talons extended.

For the record, the species has been seen as far north in Colorado as Gregory Canyon in Boulder County (1982) and the Rocky Mountain Arsenal (1975). Six of the 10 known Colorado encounters were along the Front Range, much of which lies within the bounds of the Mexican Spotted Owl's potential range, as mapped by wildlife scientists.

— **Patrick O'Driscoll**, editor



IN THIS ISSUE

- 2 On the Cover**
Mexican Spotted Owl:
Seldom-seen until a recent
DFO trip . . . to Arizona
- 5 From the President**
Sometimes the most interesting
summer birding may be just
outside your door
- 7 DFO News Notes**
- 9 Monthly Programs**
- 14 In Memoriam**
Remembering Patty Echelmeyer
and Allison Hilf
- 20 From the Field**
More trips, more days, more
places, more people = more
FUN in 2023
- 22 DFO History**
Waterton memories: 50 years
later, re-tracing footsteps of a
boy's first DFO outing
- 24 DFO Grants**
DFO-supported research:
Hybridization among House
Wrens on the Front Range
- 27 Last Look, Last Word**
Field tripping: 12 days hop-
scotching the "Sky Islands"
of Arizona's desert sea

The Lark Bunting newsletter of Denver Field Ornithologists is published online monthly at dfobirds.org except for joint issues in July–August and February–March.

PUBLICATION STAFF

Editor

Patrick O'Driscoll

Assistant Editor

Mike Fernandez

Photo Editor

Jim Esten

Layout and Design

Jennie Dillon

Contributors this issue

William C. Anderson, John Breitsch, Tamie Bulow, Bob Buttery, Cynthia Cestkowski, Mark Chavez, Wendy Clyne, Patricia Cullen, Jim Esten, Mike Fernandez, John Fielder, Justin Fosha, Kris Haglund, Rachel Kolokoff Hopper, Joey Kellner, Terri Kurtz, Gwen Moore, Judy Propper, Rob Raker, David Suddjian, Susan Suddjian, Scott Taylor, Sharon Tinianow, Michelle Trotter, Doug Ward

CONTRIBUTE TO THE NEWSLETTER

Submit original articles or story ideas to the editor at patodrisk@gmail.com.

Send image-file photos of birds or bird outings to the photo editor at jcesten@gmail.com.

Editors reserve the right to accept and edit suitable articles and photos for publication.

NEWSLETTER ADVERTISING

The Lark Bunting does not accept or contain paid advertising. DFO **AdBIRDtisements** are FREE to club members to seek or sell bird-related equipment, supplies, books and decorative items (artwork, photos, clothing, note cards, etc.).

- Ads must include name, email and/or telephone number, and may include weblink if items offered online
- Ads may be edited for inappropriate content or excessive length (125-word limit); ONE photo or image per ad
- Ads do not carry over each month. To renew, resubmit by next deadline
- Available *only* to DFO members
- Deadline: last day of month except January and June (*The Lark Bunting* does not publish in February and July)

Send AdBIRDtisement materials to editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com.

Next deadline: Monday, July 31





A community of birders, learning and acting together for avian wildlife

Denver Field Ornithologists is an all-volunteer organization that conducts hundreds of free birdwatching field trips throughout the year and welcomes participation and membership by all. DFO promotes enjoyment of nature, the study of birds, and protection of them and their habitats in greater Denver and beyond.

In addition to field trips, evening programs and birding workshops, DFO conducts community science in the field, including the spring Hawk Watch raptor migration count on Dinosaur Ridge.

DFO awards grants annually for bird-related research, education and conservation projects in Colorado. For more information, visit the [Research, Education & Conservation Grants](#) page on the DFO website.

DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and financial contributions to DFO's three giving funds are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

DFO OFFICERS

President

Sharon Tinianow
sharontinianow@gmail.com

Vice President

Matt Rodgers (Interim)
mattrodgers79@gmail.com

Secretary

Nathan Bond
dfobirds.secretary@gmail.com

Treasurer

Kathy Holland
kcloudview@comcast.net

Past President

Susan Blansett
susan.blansett@gmail.com

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Karen Drozda
drozforte@aol.com

Mary Geder
mfg5000@live.com

Cyndy Johnson
cyndyjohnson28@msn.com

Tina Jones
tjcalliope@hotmail.com

Roger Koester
koester1949@gmail.com

Patrick O'Driscoll
patodrisk@gmail.com

Janet Peters
j.f.peters58@gmail.com

Courtney Rella
dr.cawtney@gmail.com

David Suddjian
dsuddjian@gmail.com

Bill Turner
toursbyturner@aol.com

Elaine Wagner
ewagner1000@yahoo.com

COMMITTEE CHAIRS & ROLES

Better Birding Skills

Sharon Tinianow (acting)
sharontinianow@gmail.com

Communications & Outreach

Patrick O'Driscoll (interim)
patodrisk@gmail.com

Conservation

Courtney Rella
dr.cawtney@gmail.com

Field Trips

David Suddjian
davidsuddjian@gmail.com

Finance

Roger Koester
koester1949@gmail.com

Grants

Elaine Wagner
ewagner1000@yahoo.com

Hawk Watch

Janet Peters
j.f.peters58@gmail.com

Membership

Cyndy Johnson
cyndyjohnson28@msn.com

Nominations

Mary Geder
mfg5000@live.com

Programs Director

Bill Turner
toursbyturner@aol.com

Historian

Kristine Haglund
kahaglund1@aol.com

Web Administrator

Jim Esten
admin@dfobirds.org

Zoom Coordinator

Peter Stoltz
dfobirds.zoom@gmail.com

DFO ONLINE

Website

dfobirds.org

Facebook Group

facebook.com/groups/dfobirds

Instagram

instagram.com/denverfieldornithologists

CONTACT

Email

dfocommsgroup@gmail.com

Via website (at bottom of home page)

dfobirds.org

US Mail

Attn: Kathy Holland, Treasurer, DFO
351 E Caley Ave, Centennial, CO 80121-2201

LEARN MORE

Membership — Join or Renew

dfobirds.org/DFO/Membership.aspx

Field Trips — Explore / Sign Up

dfobirds.org/FieldTrips.aspx

Volunteering

dfobirds.org/DFO/Volunteer.aspx

Charitable Giving

dfobirds.org/DFO/Donations.aspx

DFO Merch Store

zazzle.com/store/official_dfo_shop



FROM THE PRESIDENT

Sometimes the most interesting summer birding may be just outside your door

Sharon Tinianow

Greetings, DFO members! I hope you've been enjoying a summer of great birding experiences, along with everything else that makes summer in Colorado a great season to be alive. Recovery from total knee replacement surgery has pretty much confined me to home this birding season. Much to my surprise, it has been a gift of sorts. The daily time I've spent in my backyard, sitting with knee elevated and doing essentially nothing, has been an unexpected learning experience.

Before this summer, I thought I knew pretty well which bird species were visiting. It's a decent if limited list for an urban yard. House Finches, Black-capped Chickadees, Northern Flickers and Downy Woodpeckers visit the feeders outside my dining room window. Mourning and Eurasian-collared doves forage on the ground beneath. Bushtits, starlings and American Goldfinches drop by occasionally. Crows sometimes perch and converse in the big trees over my yard, while White-breasted Nuthatches forage up and down the trunks. Sometimes I hear an Eastern Screech Owl calling from my neighbor's tree; once a Great-horned Owl perched in a tree across the street.

But my summer in the yard has taught me I was missing a lot — not just additional species in my yard, but how birds use the resources they find outside my door.

My first surprise was a hummingbird attracted not to the feeder but to the honeysuckle vine I planted three years ago. It's the first year the vine has reached the top of the pergola, and it has bloomed all summer. The bird is a female Broad-tailed Hummingbird, so her flight is silent. Every morning she draws nectar from the red, tubular blossoms, perching on the vine between sips. The plant is doing what I had hoped it would do; maybe I don't need the feeder at all.

I've heard Spotted Towhees all over the neighborhood, but I did not realize they were dropping in to scratch up morsels beneath my shrubbery or perch on an old telephone wire to deliver their distinctive song.

The finches and chickadees visit the birdbath as much if not more than the feeders. They arrive in pairs or small groups,



Spotted Towhee juvenile
in a Denver yard
Patrick O'Driscoll



Sharon Tinianow

Continued on page 6

perching on that same wire before dropping down to the birdbath. Back up on the wire afterwards, they chatter away before taking off.

I guess placing the birdbath below the wire was a good move, though I didn't plan it. Just over the fence, my neighbors planted a crabapple tree. The chickadees have made good use of its dense leaf cover; I think they might have nested there.

The birds, of course, don't recognize our human-made borders. They fly to shelter, water and food wherever they can find it. Where I put plants and water in my yard is important, but envisioning and involving the larger landscape of fences, trees and other structures supports backyard birds even more.

A few years ago, I took an online course with Audubon of the Rockies about how to create habitat that supports birds in your backyard. I earned certification for my property as a [Habitat Hero Garden](#) for the percentage of native plant species, the year-round presence of water, and the lack of pesticides and chemical fertilizers. What I've seen of the birds this year has inspired me to make more changes so my yard is an even better place for birds.

As I mused about which plants I might add to the garden next year, I remembered reading the book [Nature's Best Hope](#) by **Doug Tallamy**. He advocates for private properties to collectively become a "homegrown national park" that provides what birds and the whole network of other living things need to thrive. I discovered that there is now a "[Homegrown National Park](#)" website devoted to this concept. Loaded with resources for property owners to join in, it's well worth a look.

Although I couldn't get out in the field to bird, it has been a rewarding summer in my backyard. I am inspired to continue watching to see who is visiting, and to find more ways to support bird life on the small patch of land I call home.

Happy birding, everyone!

Sharon Tinianow, who joined DFO in 2016, was elected club president in April 2023. A former editor of *The Lark Bunting*, she began birding in an ornithology class in college. Sharon retired as assistant director of CU Boulder's Museum of Natural History.



Remembering DFO friends . . .

Seasons change and birds come and go, sometimes never to return. So, too, do birding friends — inevitably, but sometimes quite unexpectedly.

The Lark Bunting sometimes pauses to note when death takes members of our DFO family. We consider it a duty to remember one and all, regardless of age, prominence or length of membership, present or past. In celebrating this month the birding lives of our departed DFO friends **Allison Hilf** and **Patty Echelmeyer**, we only regret that we did not learn of each's passing until months and whole seasons had gone by.

Please consider this simple reminder and request: If you ever hear or know of the death of a DFO member or friend, present or former, would you let us know? We seek to pay tribute to all, from long-timers who participated and led the way before us to newer friends taken from us too soon.

On such occasions, drop me an email at patodrisk@gmail.com, or text or call me at 303-885-6955 mobile. Thanks for helping us honor the lives of our departed DFO friends.

— **Patrick O'Driscoll**

DFO News Notes

Got blurbs on birds? Share with **DFO News Notes**: Colorado birding newsbits, eBird milestones, tales from the trail, birding life (and life birds!), etc., compiled by newsletter editor **Patrick O'Driscoll**. Send him your items, photos, links and anything else at patodrisk@gmail.com.

“FALLING FOR WARBLERS” IS AUG. 17 PRE-MIGRATION BIRD BOMB

Fall migration is just weeks away. If you're looking to improve your skill at ID'ing southbound autumn warblers, DFO's next “BIRD BOMBS” mini-webinar is for you. “Falling for Warblers” (Thursday, Aug. 17, 7 p.m. MDT via Zoom) will feature host **David Suddjian**'s tips for sussing out sometimes-confusing autumn warblers. Learn to pick and choose and get the ID right. Registration is required; [click here to sign up](#). And if you missed the July BIRD BOMB or any others in the series, go to the [archive](#) on the DFO website to watch them.



SEWER WORK RAVAGES 1ST CREEK HABITAT @ GREEN VALLEY RANCH

Construction crews for an Aurora sewer line project have mowed down hundreds of trees in the First Creek corridor near a popular and productive Denver eBird hotspot barely 4 years old. Apparently there are no plans to restore the creekside woods once the pipeline is done. All this according to “[A Sewer Runs Through It](#),” a front-page exposé in a community newspaper 12 miles from the destruction zone.

Mark Silverstein, a Denver writer and photographer who regularly visits the “[First Creek @ Green Valley Ranch](#)” eBird hotspot, lives in Denver’s Park Hill neighborhood. He found

a receptive editor at *The Greater Park Hill News*, the local monthly. In a note to readers about why an out-of-neighborhood story headlines the August issue, editor **Cara DeGette** promised to follow the story, “because if we don’t, who will?” Silverstein’s photos chronicle the damage to beneficial wildlife habitat: 5-foot-wide cottonwood stumps, a denuded streamside wetland, and a wide pipeline swath that skirts tiny Dunkirk Pond, a modest refuge for migrant and year-round birdlife.

In just 4 years, birders have recorded 200 species there, including unexpected rarities (Blackburnian Warbler, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Blue-winged Warbler). “It’s a mess out there. It is too depressing,” said veteran DFO field trip leader **John Breitsch**, a Green Valley Ranch resident who discovered the bird-rich haven nearly a decade ago and persuaded eBird in 2019 to make it a hotspot. [Click here](#) to read Silverstein’s full report.



DFO TEAM WINS CFO'S BIRDING CHALLENGE FUNDRAISER

The Colorado Field Ornithologists' third annual [Colorado Birding Challenge](#) for bird research and conservation drew 26 teams and more than 60 individual birders last May. Participants sought to see the most species and raise the most funds in a single day of birding. DFO's own entry, formed for a May 20 field trip in Jefferson County's Deer Creek Canyon, called themselves the DFO Deer Creekers. And when the day was done, the four-person team was named team fundraising champion. The members—who included DFO Field Trip chair **David Suddjian**, trip leader **Anne Craig** and members **Dana Hiatt** and **Mary Fran O'Connor**—raised \$7,820, fully one-third of the total \$23,241 contributed for this year's recipient: Pinyon Jay research in the West. The DFO squad found 93 species in the Deer Creek watershed. In addition, Suddjian

Continued on page 8

was named individual fundraising champ for bringing in \$3,710 himself. Congratulations, David and the Deer Creekers!

FRONT RANGE REFUGE “FRIENDS” CELEBRATE, RAISE FUNDS AT ARSENAL

The nonprofit “friends” group that serves national wildlife refuges along Colorado’s Front Range is planning its annual [Harvest Moon Dinner and Silent Auction](#) Sept. 23 at Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR headquarters in Commerce City. One week later, Friends of Front Range Wildlife Refuges will celebrate National Wildlife Refuge Week on Sept. 30 with [Refuge Day](#), a festival of booths, art projects, tours, and other fun activities at the Arsenal. The group supports outreach and education work in local communities around the Front Range’s NWRs, which include the Arsenal, Rocky Flats NWR outside Golden and Two Ponds NWR in Arvada. Tickets (\$25-\$60 donation) for Harvest Moon (5-9 p.m. MDT Sept. 23) are available via [Eventbrite at this link](#).

BIRD NAME GAME 2023: CORDIE’S IS OLD, GOSHAWK’S IS NEW

The annual summer “check-list supplement” of North American bird species from the American Ornithological Society (AOS) is out, and it is blissfully short and simple for birders in Colorado. Cordilleran Flycatcher (*Empidonax occidentalis*), the wild-eyed Colorado summer nester, used to be called Western Flycatcher until 1989, when AOS’s predecessor, the American Ornithologists’ Union, split apart it and the regionally different (but still nearly identical) Pacific-slope Flycatcher (*Empidonax difficilis*). After new scholarship second-guessed 34-year-old thinking, voila! Cordie and Pac-slope are back together as Western Flycatcher (*Empidonax difficilis*) — and we lose one of my favorite bird names to pronounce en Español: “coor-de-YAIR-an.”

Meanwhile, recent studies of DNA, vocalizations and morphology in Northern Goshawks (*Accipiter gentilis*) led the society to reverse the 1957 lumping of goshawk species and re-classify the one here in North America to American Goshawk (*Accipiter atricapillus*) and re-name the Old World species as Eurasian Goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*). [Click here](#) for the complete AOS rundown on these and other species, courtesy of American Birding Association.



NATIONAL AUDUBON’S TOP 100 BIRD PIX FOR 2023

We at *The Lark Bunting* appreciate the excellent bird photography that helps fill our pages — and we encourage YOU to send your best shots any time, any day of the year to our photo editor at jesten@gmail.com. But we also like to pause each year at this time to marvel at the amazing exposures that the annual Audubon Photography Awards competition brings forth. The year 2023 is no exception, and National Audubon recently posted its 14th annual Audubon Photography Awards Top 100 for everyone’s enjoyment. [Click here](#) and enjoy!

HEAR THAT? . . . NO? . . . IT’S THE AGING BIRDER’S DILEMMA

A guest essay in *The New York Times* the other day caught this birder’s eye. In “[The Birds Are Singing, but Not for Me](#),” 50-something biologist and author **David George Haskell** recounts missing out on the sound of [Blackpoll Warbler](#) migration this past spring over his Tennessee home. It wasn’t about absent birds, but rather his own “creeping deafness.” Hearing loss is not an issue just for older birders, though. Haskell cites a [National Institutes of Health report](#) that while half of Americans over age 75 “report some trouble hearing,” 15 percent of those over age 18 do, too. For birders, the loss is often most acute for higher-frequency sounds. “I could hear other everyday sounds . . . but the blackpoll’s song was gone,” Haskell laments. Once lost, hair cells in the inner ear, vital for hearing, don’t grow back. Haskell suggests a coping tool he tries when in the field with his better-hearing college biology students: Use all the senses to pay more attention to vibrations, beats, and hums. “We send our bodily attention outward,” he says, “using ears, palms, soles, guts and muscles.” Hmm, makes sense. I’m not all ears, but I’m all ears about this.

CANCELED:

John Fielder program Aug. 28

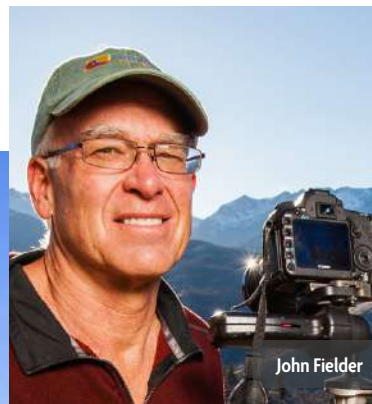
A planned special DFO evening program in August by famed Colorado wilderness landscape photographer **John Fielder** has been canceled. Fielder was scheduled to celebrate his 50 years of exploring and photographing the state with **“Retrospective: Changing Colorado Landscapes, 1973-2023”** in a Zoom presentation on Monday, Aug. 28.

Just before deadline for this issue of *The Lark Bunting*, we received word that Fielder, 72, had to cancel because of illness. He had revealed in a Denver Post interview last spring that he was battling pancreatic cancer. By August, his condition had declined to the point that he could not go forward with the DFO program.

Fielder’s presentation would have coincided with the donation this year of his photographic life’s work to [History Colorado](#), official caretaker agency and museum for the state’s historical memory. His living bequest includes more than 7,500 photos as well as artifacts, books, papers and oral histories “about life on the wilderness trail.”

Although we regret that he will not be able to address DFO personally, members can still experience Fielder’s wondrous works at the museum and online. History Colorado is planning a new exhibit, [“REVEALED: John Fielder’s Favorite Place,”](#) that will feature his most iconic images. And his vast collection of photographs is now available on the museum website for free use by the public in its new [John Fielder’s Colorado Collection](#). “No matter what happens to me in the next six months,” he told his interviewer last May, “my photos are there at History Colorado.”

DFO has rescheduled a substitute program for Aug. 28 (see page 10). Please check the DFO website’s [UPCOMING PROGRAMS](#) page for further updates.





Mary Taylor Young

FALL PROGRAM PREVIEW

Bluebird Seasons: Witnessing Climate Change in My Piece of the Wild

Mary Taylor Young
Monday, August 28
7 p.m. MDT via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

Although most of us didn't know it at the time, climate change was already a gathering storm in 1995. That year, **Mary Taylor Young** and her husband bought 37 acres in the southern Rockies. They had a sunrise view of Fishers Peak (now one of Colorado's newest state parks) and wildlife were everywhere: bluebirds and bears, elk and coyotes, hummingbirds and hawks. They built a cabin and set up a trail of bluebird nest boxes. She began a nature journal.

Over the next 25 years, things changed noticeably. Familiar birds were seen less often. New species expanded their ranges from the south. Bears seemed to enter hibernation later. Drought and wildfires increased. The pine forest around them began to die.

Young realized her nature journal held an answer. Evidence of the changing climate was woven through decades of entries. The stories they told echoed across everyone's backyard in her wild neighborhood. Her observations are the topic of DFO's September program meeting (**Aug. 28, 7 p.m. MDT via Zoom**), based on Young's new book, *Bluebird Seasons: Witnessing Climate Change In My Piece of the Wild*.

Despite worrisome changes, she tells a story of hope, not loss — the resilience of nature, the passion of youth, and human ability to overcome great challenges. For one thing, the bluebirds still return every spring.

A naturalist and award-winning author, Young has written about Colorado and the West for more than 35 years. She received the Colorado Authors League's Lifetime Achievement Award in 2020 and was inducted into the Colorado Authors Hall of Fame in 2019. Her 22 books include *The Guide to Colorado Birds*; *Rocky Mountain National Park: The First 100 Years* (where she was a National Park Service artist-in-residence in 2012) and *Land of Grass and Sky: A Naturalist's Prairie Journey*. Her "Words on Birds" column ran in *Denver's Rocky Mountain News* for 16 years. She earned a bachelor's degree in zoology at Colorado State University.



Young with her book

FALL PROGRAM PREVIEW



Tamie Bulow



Altamira Oriole
Tamie Bulow

Birding the Lower Rio Grande Valley: Top 5 Hotspots and More

Tamie Bulow
Monday, October 23
7 p.m. MST via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

A birding adventure to deep South Texas can be one of the most exhilarating and rewarding trips in the continental US. Owing to its famous, border-defining river, the Lower Rio Grande Valley actually lies farther south than one-third of Mexico. That accident of political geography offers the opportunity to find vagrant bird rarities from Mexico in the valley on a regular basis, as well as the more than 500 species of birds that migrate seasonally through the area or call it home.

Former DFO president **Tamie Bulow** (2005-2007) calls it home, too. Before moving to the Lower Rio Grande Valley to manage the South Padre Island Birding & Nature Center, she worked as manager of conferences, conventions and tours for Colorado-based [American Birding Association](#). Now retired, Bulow lives in the border city of Harlingen, TX but continues to dabble in birding work.

Bulow says her free evening presentation, “Birding the Lower Rio Grande Valley: Top 5 Hotspots and More” (**Oct. 23, 7 p.m. MDT via Zoom**), will reveal “five places that are a must visit” for birders, “and another 30 or 40 that won’t disappoint.” She also says there are “15-20 specialties that you must come to the Rio Grande Valley for if you want them on your North American List.” Birds like Great Kiskadee and Green Jay, Buff-bellied Hummingbird and Altamira Oriole, Groove-billed Ani and Green Kingfisher.

Bulow has more advice: “Spring migration is best, but a mild winter can’t be beat for delightful birding. Top tip: Avoid summer. You will thank me later.”

Although she was born in Boston, Bulow’s family moved

around — Connecticut, Denver, Richmond, Atlanta. “Twelve schools in 12 years,” she says. “Mom was a backyard birder, so I grew up filling feeders and calling out birds that were feeding there. When I got my first house, the first thing I did was hang a bird feeder, and then chuckled to myself, ‘I must be a birder!’”

She returned to Colorado as a student at the University of Denver and worked after graduation at local ice arenas, managing the DU Arena and its youth sports program. Later, her travel as a sales rep for skate maker Riedell Skates “fed my birding addiction.”

Still later, a transfer to Albuquerque led her to start “Thursday Birders” there — like Denver’s own Tuesday Birders weekly meetup group. She would become president of Central New Mexico Audubon Society and VP of the state Audubon organization. She says that prepared her to be DFO president after she moved back to Denver.

Left jobless after years with ABA, she applied to be director of South Padre Island Birding & Nature Center in Texas and landed the job. During her years in south Texas, she also managed nature tourism for Chambers County east of Houston and as executive director of the Texas Tropical Trail region for the Texas Historical Commission.

Today Bulow writes grants for Space Coast Birding & Wildlife Festival (Port Canaveral, FL). “But basically I am retired,” she says, though she does “some bird guiding” at local festivals and privately, and volunteers for the Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival. A Texas Master Naturalist, she is working on learning the butterflies and plants of the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

FALL PROGRAM PREVIEW

Wildlife, Wetlands and the Everglades

Lauren Jonaitis and Stephanie Clements

Monday, November 27

7 p.m. MST via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)



These are perilous times for the Everglades. South Florida's birding-rich "River of Grass" seems in constant turmoil, whether it's a hidden legion of alien, wildlife-killing Burmese pythons run amok or the unending power struggle over the control and quality of water and the threat of encroaching development across the region.

On the Monday after Thanksgiving, DFO's final evening program of the autumn 2023 season will explore the rich history and science of this vast, iconic landscape with two Everglades advocates from the [Tropical Audubon Society](#) of Miami. "Wildlife, Wetlands and the Everglades" (**Nov. 27, 7 p.m. MST via Zoom**) will feature Tropical Audubon senior Conservation director **Lauren Jonaitis** and Education & Advocacy director **Stephanie Clements**.

"You will gain knowledge about the birds and other wildlife who depend on the Everglades habitats and discover why this ecosystem is so important ecologically, culturally and economically to Florida," said Jonaitis, who works on the "project delivery team" for several Everglades restoration projects. She joined Tropical

Audubon last year to focus on expanding and amplifying the organization's role and reach across South Florida. Previously, she worked for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to reduce artificial light pollution effects on sea turtles and their coastal nesting habitat.

Jonaitis also worked in private industry as an environmental/coastal scientist, focused on permitting and dune restoration and maintenance. Currently, she is vice president of Policy for the Society of Conservation Biology North America. She is also the society's Communications chair. She holds a bachelor's degree in zoology from State University of New York at Oswego and a master's in conservation and population biology from Bowling Green State University in OH.

Clements oversees Tropical Audubon's flagship Ambassador Program, which cultivates volunteer environmental advocates across Miami. She is now working to broaden its membership among underrepresented and excluded communities. She earned her doctorate in biology from the University of Miami, where her dissertation focused on conservation of reptiles and amphibians in human-modified landscapes of Miami and Costa Rica. In her doctoral work, Clements studied both native and non-native reptiles and amphibians in the Everglades and other prominent South Florida ecosystems. She worked previously as an interpretive ranger in the National Park Service, field manager for an environmental advocacy group, and as a children's educational instructor at a zoo.



DFO WORKSHOP REVIEW

Front Range bird habitats: Who lives where?

Sharon Tinianow

About 20 birders gathered via Zoom in late July for a joint DFO-Colorado Parks & Wildlife workshop to learn about the five principal bird habitats along the Front Range and the species found in them.

The July 27 webinar, “[Birding by Habitat](#),” was hosted by **Mary McCormac**, statewide Interpretation & Wildlife Viewing coordinator for CPW, with DFO President **Sharon Tinianow** and Conservation Committee chair **Courtney Rella** as co-hosts.

“As they say, a bird’s habitat is often a signature of its identity,” McCormac noted as she introduced the session with a refresher on the four basic keys to bird ID: Size/shape, color pattern, behavior, and habitat. “What we say is, home is where the habitat is.”

Led by McCormac and a team of small-group discussion facilitators (Colorado Field Ornithologists president and DFO member **Chuck Hundertmark** and DFO’s **Susan Blansett**, **Mary Geder**, **Peter Ruprecht**, and **David Suddjian**), workshop participants met online in breakout sessions to examine five of Colorado’s many bird habitats (shown here with some of the “specialist” birds found in each):

- **Grasslands** (Western Meadowlark, Burrowing Owl and many more)
- **Riparian** (numerous waterfowl, waders and stream-dependent species)
- **Montane Shrubland** (Woodhouse’s Scrub-Jay, Green-tailed Towhee)
- **Montane Forest** (Western Bluebird, Steller’s Jay, Mountain Chickadee)
- **Alpine and Sub-Alpine** (Willow and White-tailed Ptarmigan, American Pipit)

Participants used a collaborative platform called Jamboard (a digitally interactive whiteboard developed by Google) to explore the features of each habitat. They posted electronic “sticky notes” to highlight and share various habitat attributes. When all the participants reconvened, the facilitators reviewed and summarized the breakout-group findings, habitat by habitat. After the webinar, the finished Jamboard data remains available to participants to use before they head into the field to bird in these habitats.

The session concluded with an array of helpful and interactive birding and habitat resources online, among them CPW’s [The Colorado Birding Trail](#) webpages, CFO’s official [state checklist of bird species](#) recorded in Colorado, and CFO’s [Colorado County Birding](#) resource website for birding in every county.

All of this is viewable on YouTube in a one-hour Zoom recording of the workshop (minus the individual facilitated breakout sessions that worked toward the conclusions). The full link is <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z9csWSJ9MY4>. A post-workshop survey will help DFO’s Better Birding Skills Committee decide whether to offer the workshop again next year.



IN MEMORIAM

Patty Echelmeyer (1927-2023): Late-'60s DFO president, trip leader wore a permanent smile

Patrick O'Driscoll

A prominent and beloved figure in the history of Denver Field Ornithologists has passed. **Patricia "Patty" Echelmeyer**, a retired homemaker, field trip leader and one of the first DFO presidents in the club's modern era, died on the first day of spring at age 95.

A longtime Wheat Ridge resident, Echelmeyer succumbed on March 20 after a heart attack. She had spent the preceding month in and out of the hospital, critical care and assisted living with various health issues after a life exceptionally free of serious illness — "and not a single broken bone," she once declared proudly. Until her death, Patty was the oldest living former DFO president.

Friends and family remembered her as independent (she still had and used her driver's license until late last year), a skilled birder, and always smiling. Later in life, she welcomed birders — both friend and stranger — into her yard to enjoy birds together. She was also an enthusiastic member of Questers antiquing club, and many recalled her appearance on the popular PBS TV series *Antiques Roadshow* when it came to Denver.

Chatting until the end, "She spent the last hour of her life telling her caregivers what a great life she had had," said DFO member **Gwen Moore**, who became friends with Echelmeyer 12 years ago over a mutual love of birds and flowers — and pickles. "She was a tonic for me — bright, optimistic, generous. When you were with Patty, she wouldn't tolerate negative stuff. I called her relentlessly cheerful."

Justin Fosha, one of Echelmeyer's two grandsons, added: "She told the nurses five minutes before she died that she'd had a fantastic life, and that at 95 she had accomplished everything she needed to. Three or four minutes later, she was gone."

Longtime member **Chris Owens** was a beginning birder when she first met Patty on a DFO field trip: "I encountered a warm smile and a lovely hug. She always made it clear she was happy to see everyone on every trip."

Cross-country move in 1950s

Echelmeyer joined the club some years after moving to Colorado in 1951. A Philadelphia native, she had met **William "Bill" Echelmeyer** as students at Penn State University. They married before moving west and lived briefly in Casper, WY (where daughter **Randy Sue** was born) before settling in Colorado.

After buying their first home in Wheat Ridge, they traded residences with the owners of a house about four blocks away — a bird-friendly spot that would earn the nickname "Newland Street National Forest" because, as Echelmeyer put it, "We have more trees than anybody." She and Bill raised Randy Sue and son **Keith Echelmeyer** in what would be Patty's home for the rest of her life.

Echelmeyer first served DFO as recording secretary (1965-68). The Colorado Bird Club had just renamed itself Denver Field Ornithologists when members started the separate Colorado Field Ornithologists as the statewide bird organization of record.

Continued on page 15

Patty was elected as DFO president twice (1968-70) and served more than two years as field trips chief and several more on the club board. She also helped create and coordinate both the Colorado Rare Bird Alert and Tuesday Birders, Denver's longtime weekly meet-up group. For years she led a section of the Denver Christmas Bird Count in Chatfield State Park.

For her volunteer service, Echelmeyer received DFO's highest honor, the Ptarmigan Award, in 1995. "When I look back," she told an interviewer in 2022, "I'm thinking, whenever DFO needed somebody or something, I did that." While president, she regularly hosted quarterly board meetings at her Newland Street home. Much later, husband Bill preceded her in death in 2005, at age 81, after 60 years together. Their son Keith, who became a prominent glaciologist in Alaska, died in 2010 at age 56.

Patty's constant companion in her final days — and for most of the previous 13 years — was **Bob Buttery**, 94, another long-ago DFO member and ex-president (1971-73). Although he retired from the U.S. Forest Service in 1982 and relocated to southeastern Arizona, Buttery and Echelmeyer remained good birding friends through the years and even got together with their non-birder spouses. Each year, Bob telephoned greetings on Patty's birthday, Dec. 17, a date she shared with the Wright Brothers' first flight in 1902. He would always kid her: "I'll bet you were there, right?"

A 4-hour coffee date

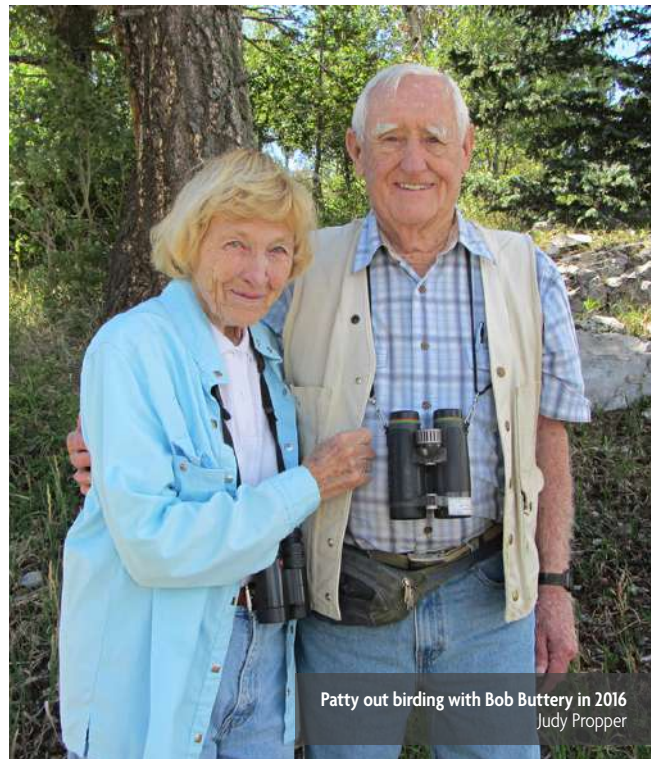
Then, in late 2009, about nine months after the death of Buttery's wife of 59 years, **Nancy**, geographical coincidence brought them together. Now living with his daughter and son-in-law in Albuquerque, Bob was going to Colorado to spend the holidays with a son and daughter-in-law who had a house near Granby. Before he could dial that annual birthday call, Patty phoned first.

"Don't call me this year," she instructed, "because I'll be with the kids for Christmas in Granby," where daughter **Randy Sue Fosha**, son-in-law **Ken Fosha**, and the grandkids own and operate [Drowsy Water Ranch](#), the world-renowned Colorado dude ranch. "You know what?" Bob replied. "I'll be in Granby, too."

Days later, on a coffee date that lasted four hours, the two 80-somethings admitted having had crushes on each other for decades. Three months later, in 2010, Patty and Bob became the second loves of each other's lives — not married (Patty "did not want to wait on anybody") but as long-distance, live-in partners. She called him "my gentleman friend," and they began to trade several-week stays together between Colorado and New Mexico.

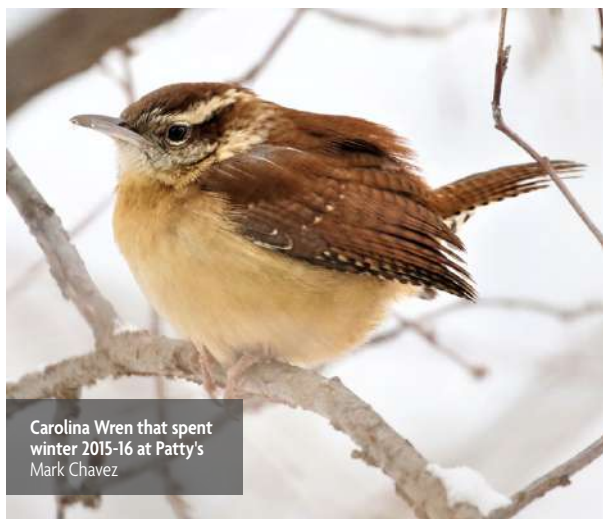
"Bob had asked my mom if it was all right that he dated her," grandson Justin Fosha recalled with a laugh. "It was pretty neat to see two folks fall in love again and rely on each other. They road-tripped down to Texas, and they still went around birding." In retirement, Buttery had built a second career in Green Valley, AZ as a bird guide, leading tours in nearby Madera Canyon and across the US, Canada and Europe.

When together, the two were inseparable — and when apart, they talked by telephone every night at 8 o'clock. "She was a bright light in my life, and the lives of others," Buttery said in a phone interview from Albuquerque, where he returned after Patty's death. "She was never in a bad mood. I was just lucky to have her for those years. She felt the same way about me, so you can't beat that."



Patty out birding with Bob Buttery in 2016
Judy Propper

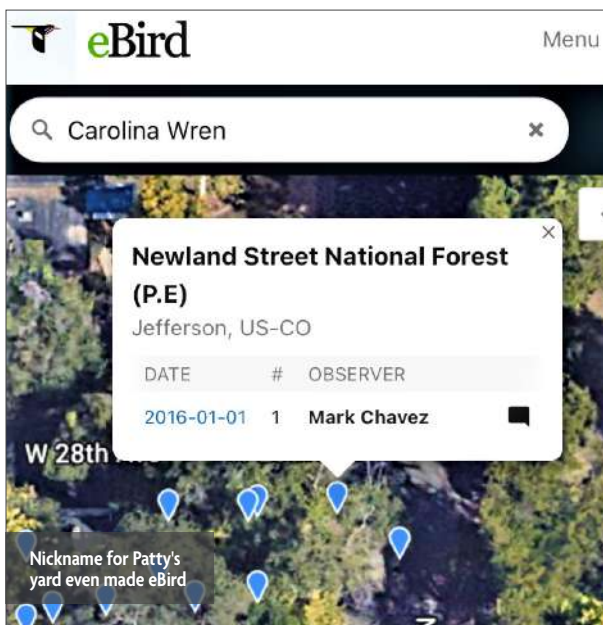
Continued on page 16



Carolina Wren that spent winter 2015-16 at Patty's
Mark Chavez



Rose-breasted Grosbeak
in Patty's yard in 2021
Mark Chavez



PATTY ECHELMMEYER *cont from page 15*

“Newland Street Forest”

As their lives slowed with age, they relied on friends to take them birding from time to time at Wheat Ridge Greenbelt, Crown Hill Park and other nearby spots. Patty's backyard “forest” took on renewed focus, given all the trees. She and Bob “spent hours and hours every fall, raking up all of the leaves,” said Moore. “They wanted to do it themselves. That's probably one reason they were still in good shape.”

The backyard “was a good bird mecca,” said Buttery; Patty's yard-bird list had passed 100 species before her death. If a rarity showed up, she happily invited other birders to visit, putting out lawn chairs in the snow. A rare Carolina Wren stayed an entire winter, as did a Harris's Sparrow. An Ovenbird lingered until Valentine's Day. Western Tanagers and Bullock's Orioles stopped by in spring. Even Bohemian Waxwings came during last winter's irruption.

Jefferson County birder **Mark Chavez**, who first met Patty 30 years ago in the field, reconnected in 2015 after the Carolina Wren arrived. “She said, ‘I'm not here tomorrow, but just come inside the house.’ I said, ‘Patty, no. I can't just walk into your house.’ She was always so welcoming.”

After a rare pair of Rose-breasted Grosbeaks visited in 2021, Chavez and fellow birder **Aaron Shipe** decided to turn the yard into an even better venue. They built an elaborate, multi-feeder station in full view from the dining room window. “We call it our totem pole,” Patty said with delight. Every week or two, Chavez and Shipe refilled it (at their own expense) with sunflower chips, shelled peanuts, suet cakes and nyjer seed.

“Seeing the joy it brought them, and to sit there and talk birds with them, Aaron and I loved that,” said Chavez, who labeled his eBird checklists from the yard as “Newland Street National Forest,” also to Patty's delight. He also recruited her and Bob as “feeder watchers” for the annual North Jeffco Christmas Bird Count: “They would sit there from sunrise to the end, so proud to participate.”

Philly girl, Jersey birder

Echelmeyer was born **Patricia Ruth Kinkead** on Dec. 17, 1927, the daughter of **William** and **Patricia Ruth (Thompson) Kinkead**. Although she grew up in Philadelphia, the neighborhood had “a lot of empty lots that made me feel like I was in the country,” she recalled last year. Vacations in rural New Jersey sparked her birding.

Continued on page 17



With daughter Randy Sue
Courtesy of Fosha family



Patty's great-grandson Chase Fosha, grandson Justin Fosha and daughter Randy Sue Fosha with some of her antique decoys
Gretta Fosha



Patty and Bob birding together
Courtesy of Bob Buttery

PATTY ECHELMAYER *cont from page 16*

"We had a cabin, where I spent most of my early summers," in Browns Mills, a woodsy escape on the edge of the Pine Barrens.

Besides birds, Echelmeyer loved burnt-edged pretzels, strawberry ice cream, hiking, gardening, Native American historical sites, and travel. She collected vintage duck decoys, one of which, crafted by a famous carver, sold at auction in New York for thousands of dollars. Grandson Justin recalls "sitting on that decoy in her living room and riding on it when I was really small. You could tell where somebody had peppered it with shotgun shot." He said his grandmother "was flabbergasted that anyone would pay that much for it. She was very frugal."

On her 95th birthday last December, friends took Patty and Bob to dinner and came back to the house for cake — "a beautiful, delicious lemon cake, with lavender flowers, and a Cedar Waxwing silk-screened on it," said Moore. "Patty said it was her best birthday ever."

Besides daughter and son-in-law Randy Sue and Ken Fosha and companion Bob Buttery, Echelmeyer is survived by grandson Justin Fosha (wife **Gretta**) and their daughter and son **Peyton** and **Chase Fosha**, grandson **Ryan Fosha** (wife **Ellen**) and their daughter **Scotty Fosha**, and Patty's daughter-in-law **Susan Campbell**, widow of son Keith Echelmeyer.

After the summer season at Drowsy Water Ranch ends, the family plans a celebration of Patty's life, probably in late September at an outdoor venue or park in the Denver area.



Allison Hilf

IN MEMORIAM

Allison Hilf (1965-2023): Passionate birder, parrot mom, generous volunteer

Patrick O'Driscoll

Allison Hilf, a 19-year member of Denver Field Ornithologists and stalwart participant in Colorado's birding community for years, has died. She was 57, a Yale-trained lawyer, avid birder and traveler, and fancier and rescuer of parrots. On Facebook, where she belonged to a flock of like-minded lovers of birds and bird humor, Allison happily labeled herself a "crazy bird nerd" and "*parront*" (i.e., "parent of parrots").

News of Hilf's passing last fall was slow to reach the broader birding community; word began to circulate widely in early June. She had died more than eight months earlier, on Sept. 28, 2022. "Allison shared her passion for birds with everyone she met and gave back to the birding community in many, many ways," her friend **Rachel Kolokoff Hopper** wrote in announcing Hilf's death on the CoBirds list-serv in June.

Longtime DFO member **Joey Kellner** remembered birding outings with Allison, especially her help on a group trip to Michigan, Ohio and Canada's [Point Pelee National Park](#), where the Mississippi and Atlantic flyways converge. "Seven participants logging 171 species during spring migration," Kellner recalled, "and she managed all the costs/expenses of the trip. All I needed to do was show everyone birds!"

Besides DFO membership and field trip participation, Allison belonged to Colorado Field Ornithologists (where she once served on the CFO board and field trip committee), Denver Audubon and Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, and she was a regional coordinator for the second *Colorado Breeding Bird Atlas*.

Details of family and survivors were incomplete. Born July 12, 1965, Hilf listed herself on Facebook as a Denver resident and "from North Miami, FL." She was the daughter of physician **Paul Burton Hilf**, formerly of Steamboat Springs, who died in Denver in 2016. She was the sister of **Jonathan Hilf**.

In larger part, her many friends were her family, both human and avian. "Allison deeply loved birds, birding, and her friends. She had a kind and loving heart and was the gentlest of souls," said Hopper. "She was a true caring friend. Quirky and loyal. People who knew her, loved her. I am sure her parrots are still grieving." Hopper's announcement about Allison's death included this line: "She leaves behind her three beloved rescues: **Buttons** and **Aye Aye** (both African Gray Parrots) and **Pickle** (a Quaker Parrot)."

A friend posted on Allison's Facebook page this list of 10 ways she would have wanted friends to remember her:

- Go birding today
- Drop all negativity today and enjoy LIFE
- Spend some time in nature
- Love yourself as you would others
- Help a friend
- Be happy with what you have
- Do something good
- Embrace your time on this fragile planet
- Donate to a good cause
- Advocate (and) educate for all human rights



Continued on page 19



Feeding parrots in Australia in 2005
Facebook

ALLISON HILF *cont from page 18*

Hilf also supported a group devoted to treating [Avian Ganglioneuritis](#), a nervous-system disorder of special concern for both wild and captive parrots. A number of her Facebook friends remarked on her commitment and generosity for such causes while dealing with her own health issues.

In 2018, she joined a volunteer team organized by the late **Joe Roller**, prominent and beloved Colorado birder, to keep alive the long-running daily Colorado Rare Bird Alert on CoBirds. After longtime compiler **Joyce Takamine** retired, Roller, Hilf and others kept it going for another year and a half before a shortage of volunteers and Roller's own declining health led him to end the alert in spring of 2020.

Interviewed after Roller's death six months later, Allison said that while he "taught me much about birds, birding and birders, I'm most grateful for what he taught me about life — to enjoy it and take the risks that matter." She recalled when Roller, a physician, convinced her "to call one of my doctors to tell them I was going to Australia even if I had to go with IV medications. Little did I know that he called my doctor that evening — and I got a 'go-and-have-fun' message from my doctor the next morning."

After completing undergraduate studies at Oberlin College, Allison earned her law degree from Yale Law School. While there, she was a member in 1988 of the *Yale Law & Policy Review*, a prestigious publication whose past contributors include a who's who of late 20th- and 21st-century justices and judges, lawmakers, diplomats, politicians and academics.



FROM THE FIELD WITH DAVID SUDDJIAN

More trips, more days, more places, more people = more FUN in 2023

David Suddjian, Field Trips chair

The Denver Field Ornithologists field trip program in 2023 is bigger than ever: More field trips on more days to more places with more participants. More birders are enjoying more new “lifer” species with DFO than ever.

And from what I’m witnessing in the field, we appear to be having even more *fun* than ever! We’re sure having a lot of it, anyway.

Through July 31 of this year, DFO offered 184 field trips, compared with 144 to date in 2022, our most recent “best” year. We have led free public field trips on 142 calendar days so far in 2023. That’s two-thirds of this year’s dates to that point. Thirty-six of DFO’s certified field trip leaders have led at least one trip so far this year.

All told, we are *averaging* 26 field trips a month, including a record 34 in May 2023 alone. (Yes, more than 1 trip a day for an *entire month*.) Our cumulative species count on all trips in 2023 so far is 384, recorded across more than 1,000 eBird checklists, many of them enriched with participants’ fine photos as well as bird sound recordings. Also, more individuals are participating in field trips — 391 different people thus far, a measure of broad appeal well ahead of the headcount of individuals at this time in 2022. Many are new birders or people who have recently restarted birding again.

But the number and frequency of free outings, probably unmatched anywhere else, are not the key measure of DFO’s field trip success. The great birding opportunities and experiences that these trips give DFO members and other participants are what will live on in their minds and memories, not the statistics.

Our trips often include birders taking their first-ever group bird outing. On one recent field trip, seven of the 10 participants self-identified as beginners or new birders. Newbies and returning birders appear to like the experience, because many sign up for more DFO trips soon after. Our trips — guided by great leaders and aided by the collaboration of all who take part — are the best hands-on learning and skill-building we can offer.

This year’s richly varied outings also have included significant DFO milestones. Our spring and summer schedule included four field trips beyond Colorado’s borders. **Joey Kellner**’s 12-day mega-excursion to southeastern Arizona in May (*see story and photo gallery on pages 27-33*) marked our first field trip to that state. **Diane Roberts** led a trip into neighboring New Mexico in June, plus two popular outings in July to Wyoming’s Snowy Mountains, DFO’s first serious visits to that neighbor-state.

Other highlights continue to push-pin the 2023 field trip map. In June, **Ben Jacques** bravely led a camping-out trip into the wilds of Saguache County, boosting DFO’s species list above 100 for that seldom-birded county. Also in June, **Gary Witt** led an overnighter to northeastern Colorado that found many of that region’s specialties.



DFO's David Suddjian and Aiken Audubon's
Tally Kerr on joint field trip July 2
Susan Suddjian

Continued on page 21



Welcome to new DFO members

Lynn Bakken of Littleton; Audrey Boller, Denver; Antoinette Burns, Colorado Springs; Lorraine Dixon-Jones, Denver; Kelly Ducham, Decatur, TN; Bill Goodwin and Jan Standard, Denver; Celia Greenman and Mike Seal, Lakewood; Seth Griger, Arvada; Morgan Kahle, Denver; Ryan Morrissey, Denver; Heather and Russell Moses, Colorado Springs; Katherine Peterson, Fort Collins; Susan Ringoen, Lafayette; Lawrence Strom, Monument; Hanna Supanich-Winter, Glendale; Laurie Tripp, Denver; Oliver Urdiales, Aurora, and Nancy Wulkan, Highlands Ranch

Thank you for your contribution

Research, Education and Conservation Grants Fund
Jim Esten

Friends of DFO
Jeremy Nichols

DFO Hawk Watch
Kelly Ducham



FROM THE FIELD *cont from page 20*

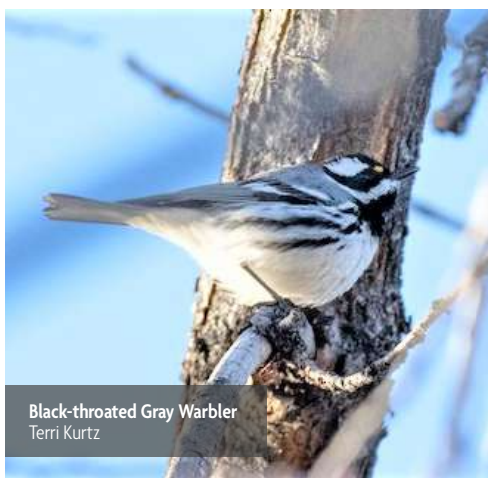
Closer to home, we continue to feature favorite local places and add more close-in spots to DFO's repertoire. New and notable this year is Aurora's Ponderosa Preserve, a 60-acre forest gem to which DFO has special access for a series of field trips. Our repeated (and popular) visits to enduring local patches often attract new birders and allow repeat participants to experience places in different seasons. Reliably in regular rotation include Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR, Prospect Park, Chatfield State Park, Bear Creek Lake Park, Ken Caryl, Deer Creek Canyon, Waterton Canyon, Denver City Park, South Platte Park and more.

We could not do any of this without volunteer trip guides. We were delighted to add five new certified field trip leaders to the roster this spring: **Gigi Zarzuela, Bailey Parkhouse, Tally Kerr, Clark Jones** and **Anna Joy Lehmicke**. (Clark and Anna Joy anticipate leading their first DFO trips soon.)

Some of them are part of DFO's new collaboration with [Aiken Audubon Society](#) to co-sponsor field trips in the greater Pikes Peak birding region. Tally Kerr led our first such outing to Cottonwood Creek Trail in Colorado Springs on July 2. Registration was via the DFO website's field trip page, and participants included locals from Aiken Audubon as well as Denver area birders. We hope to gradually develop this promising partnership into a series of joint trips — yet more outings in what is becoming DFO's most productive field trip year ever.



Doug Ward with Hugh and Urling Kingery



Black-throated Gray Warbler
Terri Kurtz



Eastern Phoebe
Terri Kurtz

DFO HISTORY

Waterton memories: 50 years later, re-tracing footsteps of a boy's first DFO outing

Patrick O'Driscoll and Doug Ward

As time passes, we find ourselves looking for milestones to benchmark our past. Even if many of them were just random and inconsequential moments in time, such milestones do inspire reflections . . . like this one.

On April 29, 1973, an almost-8-year-old boy named **Doug Ward** and his mother, **Judy Ward**, joined a Denver Field Ornithologists trip up Waterton Canyon in Jefferson County. It was their first such outing of any kind, and it set them both on a lifelong course of appreciation for birds and the pursuit of conservation.

Fifty years later to the day, Doug re-lived this milestone, leading the same DFO field trip that Colorado birding legend **Hugh Kingery** had guided half a century before. Hugh himself even met Doug at the trailhead this past April 29 to bring that first DFO birding memory full circle.

Back in 1973, young Doug had taken interest in birds around his central Denver yard. He had also spent hours inside the old aviary at the Denver Zoo, trying to match the live birds flying around with their pictures on the wall. His mom contacted the Denver Museum of Natural History (now Museum of Nature & Science) to ask about beginning bird workshops for kids. The museum didn't have any, but someone there said DFO, which called the museum home for decades, just might.

It turned out there was a trip scheduled at Waterton Canyon in a couple of weeks, one of 10 outings that month (our club was quite busy even back then). Best of all, beginners like Doug and his mom were welcome. Judy signed them up, and they joined as guests for the day. It was so cool for them to be out there, and "Mr. Kingery" kind of took Doug under his wing, pointing out this and that and why it was different, and letting him go "find stuff." Hugh's knowledge, enthusiasm and, especially, his patience with an exuberant little kid, unlocked a whole new view of the natural world for the Wards.

A year and a half and several more trips later, the family joined DFO. Before long, Judy was volunteering to help put out the club newsletter. (Doug still remembers being "child labor" at their dining room table, helping staple, label and stamp hundreds of copies of *The Lark Bunting* for mailing.) The editor,

Continued on page 23

Jack Reddall, became one of Doug's primary mentors, and Judy succeeded him as editor (1981-84).

Looking back and forward sparked a number of reflections for Doug, most noticeably on the geographical changes since 1973. There's a large lake today where there wasn't one then. Although the new dam was nearly complete, Chatfield Reservoir had yet to fill. Just as obvious and even more impactful is how many people live around and near it today. Back then, Waterton was pretty remote.

Waterton was also an important migrant trap where riparian cottonwoods ribboned out of the mountains along the South Platte River. It was the first refuge that birds might encounter for 40-50 miles as they moved north along the Front Range. But now, the sprawl of suburbs and people seems to have diluted this importance, though Doug's perception may or may not be reality. Regular site-sampling visits over years of field trips and seasonal counts by DFO and others may gauge these effects over time. Perhaps we might complete and analyze the data at Waterton to spot the trends.

Doug can't say why, but he kind of expected to see a more dramatic shift in species and numbers of the birds he encountered in 1973 (53 species, 707 birds) and this spring (64, 440), given that the weather and time in the field were similar. But aside from Eastern Phoebe rising from super-rarity to a regular, most every other species was within expected daily variability. Thanks to extensive conservation measures, we've seen a few species do better than 50 years ago, including Wood Duck, Osprey and Bald Eagle (all present on this year's trip but absent in 1973).

Chatfield Reservoir's presence certainly boosts the area's diversity of water-dependent species. At the same time, loss of open country and riparian habitat to the lake and the many housing subdivisions have affected other species: Mourning Dove, Great Blue Heron (no more historic rookery along the river), Northern Harrier (called "Marsh Hawk" back then), Downy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Black-billed Magpie and Western Meadowlark among them. Such shifts are fairly straightforward, but several species seem to have increased in abundance, including Common Raven and particularly Spotted Towhee (known as Rufous-sided Towhee in 1973). But other species decreased (starlings and grackles) with no obvious reason why.



With the marvel of eBird at its fingertips, Doug's group recorded three checklists for the 50th anniversary outing: [Waterton Canyon Upstream](#), [Waterton Canyon Downstream](#), and [Platte Canyon Reservoir](#). Until eBird, DFO recorded most trip checklists in the printed pages of the monthly newsletter. You can see Kingery's official tally for the original trip in the May 1973 issue of *The Lark Bunting* (pages 2-4, in the column labeled "WAT – 29"). Find it via the scroll-down archive (by year and month) in the left column of the [DFO website's newsletter page](#).

Although half a century apart, both outings were meant primarily to bird a great location in the early days of spring migration. But they also ended up being two points along a lifetime path. The group was so fortunate to have Hugh and his wife and birding partner **Urling Kingery** join them on this April 29 anniversary. Thanks for that, Hugh, but thanks even more for the direction you've given Doug and countless others on a life's journey of bird appreciation.

*Denver native **Doug Ward**, a DFO member off and on since 1974, is a retired mining engineer who splits time between northern Idaho and the Denver area. He is an eBird reviewer for Wyoming and a member of the Idaho Bird Records Committee.*

DFO GRANTS

DFO-supported research: Hybridization among House Wrens on the Front Range

Editor's note: Recipients of annual grants from DFO's Research, Conservation & Education Grant Fund report back to our membership with presentations at monthly program meetings, field trips at research sites, or articles in *The Lark Bunting*. This article is about a 2022 grant recipient's project at the University of Colorado Boulder.

.....

Cryptic genomic divergence in a familiar backyard bird, the House Wren

The Taylor Lab, University of Colorado Boulder, Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology

William C. Anderson, Garth Spellman, Scott A. Taylor



House Wren
Patrick O'Driscoll

William C. Anderson

In 2021 and 2022, I worked on the [Boulder Chickadee Study](#), a long-term research project focused on trying to understand why Black-capped and Mountain chickadees sometimes hybridize. The study's network of about 400 bird nest boxes enables observation and blood-sampling of adult and nestling chickadees that are vital to this research.

Aside from chickadees, many other cavity-nesting bird species use our nest boxes. We've found White-breasted, Red-breasted and Pygmy nuthatches, and this year even Violet-green Swallows. We sometimes even get Abert's Squirrels. Perhaps not surprisingly, the House Wren (*Troglodytes aedon*) also nests in many of them.

Although almost every Colorado birder knows this diminutive backyard bird by sight and sound, there's much more to tell. House Wrens range throughout the Americas — north across Canada between southern British Columbia and the Canadian Maritimes, throughout the continental US, and south all the way to Tierra del Fuego. All told, 32 subspecies are found across this hemisphere-sized range.

With House Wrens available to study, I focused on two northern subspecies — *Troglodytes aedon* and *Troglodytes aedon parkmanii* — that correspond respectively to the species' Eastern and Western genetic groups. As far as we know, they are the only two House Wren subspecies that migrate. I started my study as an undergraduate honors student using an approach that sequenced a small subset of the House Wren genome. My results from this initial work found some significant differences in the genomes of the eastern and western subspecies. It also found that they were interbreeding (i.e., hybridizing) extensively with each other along Colorado's Front Range. But the small dataset did not provide enough detail to really understand what parts of the genome differ between the two subspecies, nor could I fully characterize their hybridization.

In my most recent research, I used whole genome data, which allowed me to look at millions (instead of hundreds) of regions in the genome. With this larger dataset I sought to answer these main questions:

- What parts of the genome differ between these two House Wren subspecies? If there are regions of the genome that differ between these eastern and western birds, what genes exist within those parts?
- Are the patterns of hybridization that I previously documented with a subset of the genome supported when I use a whole-genome sequencing approach?

Continued on page 25

To proceed, I needed two kinds of samples: some from geographic areas where only Eastern or Western House Wrens occur, and samples from the contact zone here in Boulder County where the two subspecies hybridize. For non-hybrid samples, I collaborated with New York's Cornell Museum of Vertebrates for Eastern-type samples and the University of Washington's Burke Museum for Western-type samples. I then used 20 House Wren samples from the chickadee study's Colorado nest boxes,

For a comprehensive look at the two groups' genomes and how they differed, we used whole genome sequencing. This allowed for very specific and direct comparisons between subspecies, with potential to tell what parts of the genome were involved in the divergence.

To compare genetic differences between groups, we use a metric called F_{ST} . This measurement can vary from 0, which means no differences between the groups, to 1, which means the groups are completely different from each other. Overall, we found a genome-wide average F_{ST} of 0.04. This means eastern and western House Wren subspecies are genetically more different from each other than Blue-winged Warblers are from Golden-winged Warblers, but less genetically different from one another than Black-capped Chickadees are from Carolina Chickadees.

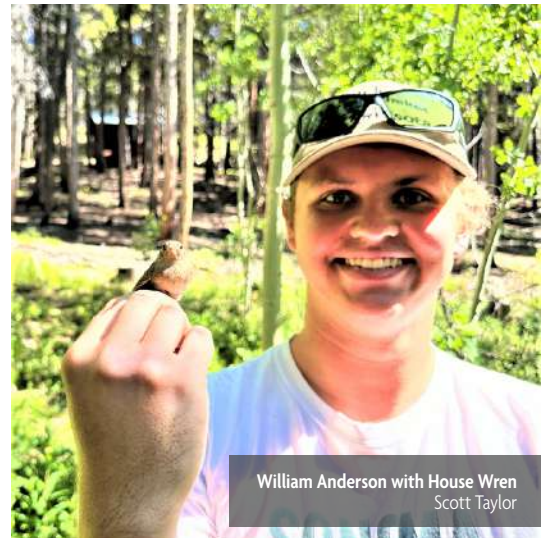
We also determined which locations in the wren genome differ the most. We found almost all the differences between Eastern and Western House Wren are in their Z sex chromosome (similar to the X chromosome in mammals). Further, the genetic differences are mostly within two chromosomal inversions, i.e. regions of the genome that have "flipped" and no longer can recombine. These flipped regions also are found in Baltimore and Bullock's orioles, as well as Common and Hoary redpolls. In wrens, it appears the genes within these inversions relate to the way birds generate energy (i.e., their metabolism).

We were also able to answer our hybridization question in support of our previous finding that every wren along the Front Range is, in fact, a hybrid of the eastern and western subspecies. The birds we sampled in the Boulder County nest boxes are, genetically, 85-90 percent western and 10-15 percent eastern. This means the Front Range is on the western edge of the House Wren hybrid zone.

We are now working to sample House Wrens across the state so that we can more accurately outline the size and boundaries of this newly described avian hybrid zone.

We could not have completed our initial work on House Wrens without the generous financial support of Denver Field Ornithologists. DFO's funding over the past two years has supported multiple genetic sequencing runs on this fascinating avian system. DFO has helped me explore my scientific interests in House Wrens, and more broadly, the generation of cryptic genetic variation — the creation of unseen or unexpressed genetic potential.

William Anderson, a birder since childhood in Santa Rosa, CA, is a PhD student in the Ecology & Evolutionary Biology Department at the University of Colorado Boulder. He has turned from birding as a hobby to using birds to answer evolutionary questions about cryptic speciation — different species sharing genetic and physical similarity.



William Anderson with House Wren
Scott Taylor



House Wren
Taylor Lab / CU Boulder

Longevity? Seventy!

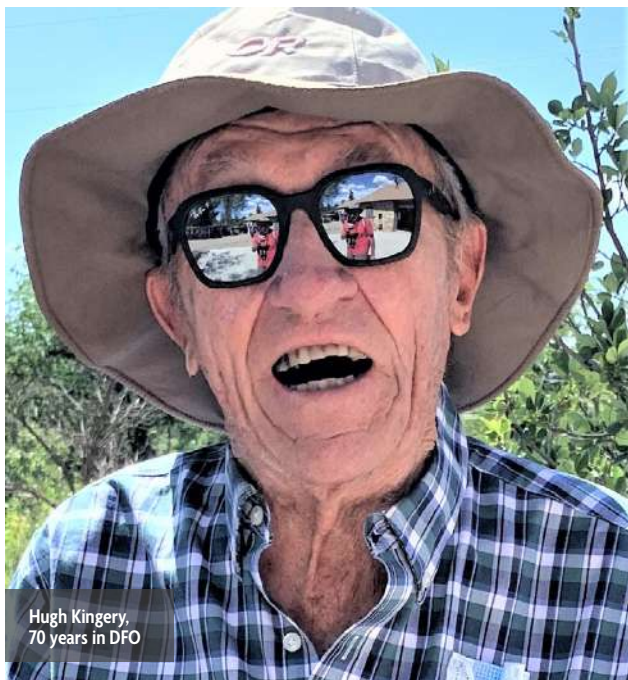
Congrats to Hugh Kingery and other longtime DFO'ers

Patrick O'Driscoll

Did you know the Denver Field Ornithologists website keeps tabs on how long you've been a member? Our "Membership Longevity" webpage displays, year by year, the enduring membership of everyone who's been in DFO 10 years or more.

The Lark Bunting wants to celebrate veteran DFO'ers' commitment to the club — and when better to start than in this, the **70th anniversary** year for the dean of Colorado birding, **Hugh Kingery**? Hugh was already an avid birder in 1953 when he joined the Colorado Bird Club, which became DFO 11 years later. As a teen, he birded Denver City Park in the late 1940s while walking to and from East High School. He kept such good records that decades later, Hugh entered his old checklists into the new eBird database, giving him the first 80 species recorded there for the park.

This begins our annual shout-out to DFO members when they reach milestone anniversaries each five years. Thanks to all of you for leading the way for those who follow. (If you're a member, you can look at where you and your friends are in the longevity list by clicking the "Members Only" link in the drop-down menu on the dfobirds.org home page.)



Here's the honor roll for 2023. Look for the 2024 list of longevity milestones in *The Lark Bunting* this time next year.

70 YEARS (1953)

Hugh Kingery, Franktown

45 YEARS (1978)

Bob Righter, Denver

40 YEARS (1983)

Peggy Gonder, Westminster, and **Rex McGehee**, Denver

35 YEARS (1988)

Diane Carter, Westminster, and **Diane Hutton**, Aurora

30 YEARS (1993)

JoAnn Hackos, Evergreen; **Steve Kennedy**, Aurora, and **Edward "Buzz" Schaumberg**, Aurora

25 YEARS (1998)

Kevin Corwin, Centennial, and **Toni Rautus**, Arvada

20 YEARS (2003)

Paula Hoffman, Denver; **Chuck Hundertmark**, Lafayette, and **Bill Turner**, Centennial

15 YEARS (2008)

Susan Clasen, Westminster; **Pamela Dowd**, Parker; **Edie Israel**, Boulder; **Jeannie Mitchell**, Elbert; **Alistair Montgomery**, Lakewood; **Marleen Swalm**, Centennial; **John Vickery**, Denver, and **Bill Wuerthele**, Denver

10 YEARS (2013)

John Ervin Alden, Highlands Ranch; **Mark Amershek**, Denver; **Julia Auckland**, Denver; **Jean Bogar**, Lakewood; **John Breitsch**, Denver; **Robert Bucknam**, Arvada; **Terry Cookro**, Denver; **Dave Driscoll**, Denver; **Chris Goulart**, Aurora; **Angela Grun**, Englewood; **Kristine Haglund**, Denver; **Becca Hammons**, Greenwood Village; **Elena Klaver**, Niwot; **Debra Lentz**, Denver; **Cynthia Madsen**, Centennial; **Joseph Margoshes**, Denver; **Robert Martinez**, Denver; **Megan Miller**, Denver; **Mary Fran O'Connor**, Centennial; **Melissa Smith**, Aurora; **Sue Summers**, Littleton; **John Taylor**, Denver; **Natalie Vande Vuss**, Morrison; **Michelle Verostko**, Littleton, and **Bruce Warneke**, Littleton

LAST LOOK, LAST WORD

Field tripping: 12 days hop-scotching the “Sky Islands” of Arizona’s desert sea

THE TRIP: SE Arizona Sky Islands / CO, AZ, NM

DATES: Thursday, May 18 – Monday, May 29

LEADER: Joey Kellner + 7 participants

SPECIES: 191 on 87 eBird checklists

<https://ebird.org/tripreport/126026>



Purple Martins on saguaro
Michelle Trotter



Blue-throated Mountain-gem, Cave Creek Canyon
Michelle Trotter

Joey Kellner

With wide-ranging habitats and close proximity to Mexico, southeastern Arizona was sure to be a hit as an out-of-state, spring-migration destination for a multiday DFO field trip. The “Sky Islands” of America’s desert Southwest did not disappoint.

Our eight-member group’s 12-day excursion in May opened with a 12-hour first day: Denver to aptly named [Portal, AZ](#), the key entryway on our itinerary. We arrived with enough daylight left to get almost everyone a life bird or two, from [Blue-throated Mountain-gem](#) to Hooded Oriole. It set a promising tone. Twelve straight days in the field can be long, demanding and exhausting. But everyone embraced each day’s early-morning departure, knowing the sunrise surge of bird activity would evaporate within hours as desert temperatures climbed.

We began in the scrub habitat of the Chihuahuan Desert and ended in the Upper Sonoran Desert. As temperatures rose, we birded our way higher to cooler elevations (and more cool birds) in the Sky Islands.

Continued on page 29



DFO group, L to R, Rob Raker, Mary and Charlie Saunders, Pat Cullen, Michelle Trotter, Chris Owens, Kirsten Ruppel, Joey Kellner
Michelle Trotter



LAST LOOK, LAST WORD *cont from page 28*

As their name suggests, the Sky Islands are the biodiverse tops of isolated mountains that rise up from the Southwest's sea of Sonoran and Chihuahuan deserts and Great Plains grasslands. Studded with pine-oak woodlands and spruce-fir summits, these rich ecosystems mark the northernmost points of Mexico's [Sierra Madre Occidental](#), a globally significant mountain *cordillera* that bridges between the temperate Colorado Plateau and Rocky Mountains to the north and Mexico's neotropical landscapes in the south.

They contain incredibly diverse plant, animal and birdlife common in Mexico but found almost nowhere else in the US — a great incentive for one of DFO's few recent out-of-state expeditions. In a stroke of luck for us, Arizona had an unusually cool and wet spring (as did Colorado). We found cactus and flowering plants already in bloom, which drew many north-bound hummingbirds to visit native plants rather than just backyard feeders.

We recorded an amazing:

- 11 hummingbird species and all of the southwestern Arizona specialty birds we had sought
- 16 species of flycatchers
- 18 species of nocturnal and diurnal raptors (including an incredibly lucky sighting of the Mexican Spotted Owl on the cover of this newsletter)

And we had an array of other special birds:

- Thrashers (including [Crissal](#) and Bendire's)
- Sparrows (among them Rufous-winged, [Botteri's](#) and Five-striped, plus Yellow-eyed Junco)
- Varied Bunting and a number of "specialty" warblers (Grace's, Lucy's, [Red-faced](#) and Olive, plus Painted Redstart)

Photos top to bottom:

Verdin in Portal, AZ (Rob Raker)

Lucy's Warbler with food (Patricia Cullen)

Red-faced Warbler (Rob Raker)

Continued on page 30



LAST LOOK, LAST WORD *cont from page 29*

Using eBird breeding codes, we also documented an [Elf Owl](#) at a nest cavity, Painted Redstarts feeding four nestlings, a Gray Hawk on a nest of sticks, and even [Elegant Trogons](#) at two different cavity nests.

Although the Sky Islands were the magnet that drew us, our route led us through ALL of the SE Arizona habitats: Chihuahuan and Sonoran desert scrublands, grasslands, riparian woodlands (river bottoms of the San Pedro and Santa Cruz rivers, and wetlands both natural and human-made), interior chaparral, pine-oak woods, and higher elevation conifer forests. And we birded the wonderful cactus “forest” of Saguaro National Park East, on the wild edge of metropolitan Tucson.

But we also spent time some mornings and evenings watching front and backyard feeders for hummingbirds, doves, sparrows, thrashers, and orioles. Portal, in particular, was a hub where some of its eBird hotspots are named for the yards and feeders of welcoming local birders. A street sign reading “Bird Haven PL” stands in a yard down past the tiny, rustic Post Office, while “Bud & Debb’s Bird Haven” in another yard invited birders to scan numerous feeders.

Photos counterclockwise from top:

Michelle and Rob take roadside aim at distant falcon (Patricia Cullen)

The bird in their lenses, Crested Caracara (Rob Raker)

Telf Owl with prey (Michelle Trotter)

In Portal, AZ (Michelle Trotter)

Continued on page 31



Besides all the birdlife, we enjoyed several species of mammals (including Coatimundi, Ringtail, Gray Fox, Yellow-nosed Cotton Rat and Coue's Deer) several species of lizards and a couple of snake species, as well as insects and bats.

I owe a huge thank you to the seven other participants — **Pat Cullen, Chris Owens, Rob Raker, Kirsten Ruppel, Charlie** and **Mary Saunders**, and **Michelle Trotter** — for making it so easy and enjoyable to lead this trip and for helping to find, identify, share and document what we saw and heard.

I can't thank them enough for being so flexible, reliable — and durable. We never went hungry, but all were up for on-the-road meals that ranged from takeout and a breakfast or two at Safeway to making sandwiches in the field and dining at nice restaurants. No one slacked, either: Morning departures usually were at sunrise (5:15-5:30 a.m.) or even earlier; yet everyone was excited and ready to go, every day.

Because I was so busy leading, I left my camera at home. But as you can see on the pages with this article, several participants took many superb photos. Some of us also made sound recordings. You can explore our species list (191 on 87 total eBird checklists), photos and recordings in this eBird report of our entire trip:

<https://ebird.org/tripreport/126026>

Joey Kellner, a 38-year member of DFO, is a field trip leader, compiler of the Denver Christmas Bird Count, club past president (1994-96), and the 2012 recipient of the Ptarmigan Award, DFO's highest honor



Photos clockwise from top:

Painted Redstart, Madera picnic area, AZ (Rob Raker)

Varied Bunting (Rob Raker)

Coatimundi (Patricia Cullen)

Gray Hawk flyover (Rob Raker)

White-eared Hummingbird (Patricia Cullen)

Broad-billed Hummingbird, Ash Canyon, AZ (Rob Raker)



Photos counterclockwise from top:

Peña Blanca Lake, AZ, the birdiest single stop with 45 species (Michelle Trotter)

Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, Portal, AZ (Michelle Trotter)

Lucifer Hummingbird (Rob Raker)

Gambel's Quail (Patricia Cullen)



Until the next Lark Bunting . . .
GOOD END-OF-SUMMER BIRDING!

Elegant Trogon
Madera Canyon, AZ
Rob Raker



THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 59 | ISSUE 10 | OCTOBER 2023

DFOBIRDS.ORG

FALL PROGRAMS

NorCO's 11 owls, Colorado's
challenging water future

PAGE 9

CHICO BASIN UPDATE

All-access birding
ends in 2024, not 2025

PAGE 16

FIELD TRIPS IN FOCUS

New feature stars YOU
on every DFO outing

PAGE 14

BOY WONDER

DFO pre-teen is on
a birding fast track

PAGE 18

dfo
DENVER FIELD
ORNITHOLOGISTS



American Avocet
Belmar Park, Lakewood
Jim Esten



A DFO member since 2014, **Jim Esten** is photo editor of

The Lark Bunting. He took photos on and off for 35 years before getting his first digital camera in 2001. He didn't focus on birds until 11 years ago while visiting his sister in Florida. He is retired from network IT service.

ON THE COVER

American Avocet: That gracefully upturned bill isn't its only charm

The cover of this month's issue of *The Lark Bunting* bids an affectionate autumn "So long" to the American Avocet (*Recurvirostra americana*). This strikingly tall and colorful wading shorebird of western wetlands is already southbound for winter in Mexico and Central America. Our cover bird was caught on camera at Belmar Park in Lakewood by **Jim Esten**, photo editor of this newsletter.

Our only avocet ([there are just four kinds in the world](#)) does not nest in high numbers here. But the eastern two-thirds of Colorado comprises a sizable south-central portion of the species' breeding territory. Its boldly patterned mix of black, white and cinnamon-peach breeding plumage atop pale bluish legs is a refreshing counterpoint to the mostly gray-brown ranks of the more than a dozen other shorebird species found in the state.

In two words, it's a graceful bird, which is exactly where its name comes from: avosetta, Italian for "graceful bird." As its scientific name suggests, the outer third of the American Avocet's long bill has an elegant *recurve*, or upturn. (ID tip: The male's bill is slightly longer, but the female's is more upturned.) Avocet mates also run a few steps together with their bills crossed right after copulating. But Cornell's *Birds of the World* and other sources tell us those aren't the avocet bill's only remarkable feature or use.

If you have observed them foraging the shallows of ponds, marshes and lakeshores, you've probably seen their side-to-side sweeping of those bills through the water as they wade forward. Like scythe-wielding grain farmers in the days before mechanical mowing, they swing slightly open bills back and forth — "scything" — to catch crustaceans and water insects.

Another I-didn't-know-THAT fact: American Avocets sometimes make like Brown-headed Cowbirds and lay eggs in someone else's nest (though only of other avocets, who won't know the difference). This brood parasitism can be tit for tat, however: Some terns and the Black-necked Stilt, the avocet's spindly legged close cousin, have been known to lay eggs in avocet nests.

Those nests, BTW, are in the open with no shading foliage, which leads to another fun fact: Avocet parents keep the incubating eggs from overheating by dipping their bellies periodically in water. Still another cool detail: the chicks leave those nests within 24 hours of hatching. They're born with the innate ability to walk, swim and dive to escape predators — though on land, they also hide in adorable multileggedness beneath parental wings. (Adult pecks on the head also teach the chicks to crouch whenever an avocet alarm call goes out for a nearby predator.)

As go our wetlands, so goes the American Avocet. Although its population is "least concern" stable, existential threats to the species include continued loss of wetlands to development and degradation, and contamination by selenium pollution from irrigation practices and methylmercury concentrations in seasonal wetlands.

— **Patrick O'Driscoll**, editor



IN THIS ISSUE

- 2 On the Cover**
American Avocet:
That gracefully upturned bill
isn't its only charm
- 5 From the President**
Keeping abreast of bird news:
the sad, the bad — and we hope,
some glad
- 7 DFO News Notes**
- 9 Monthly Programs**
- 14 Field Trips in Focus**
We need DFO birders birding pix!
- 16 Chico Basin Update**
Another blow: State to end
open access at Chico this winter
- 18 DFO People**
Denver pre-teen is new face on
a birding fast track: "I'm just a kid
that likes birds"
- 21 DFO Grants**
2023's DFO grantees tackle
climate effects on Colorado
species, habitat
- 24 Last Word, Last Look**
Fall migration: "The world moves
... and we long to move with it"

The Lark Bunting newsletter of Denver Field Ornithologists is published online monthly at dfobirds.org except for joint issues in July–August and February–March.

PUBLICATION STAFF

Editor

Patrick O'Driscoll

Assistant Editor

Mike Fernandez

Photo Editor

Jim Esten

Layout and Design

Jennie Dillon

Contributors this issue

Tamie Bulow, Abby Burk, Joe Chen, Jim Esten, Mike Fernandez, John Fielder, Kris Haglund, Linda Hodges, Rob Raker, Scott Rashid, Courtney Rella, John Salisbury, Archer Silverman, David Suddjian, Sharon Tinianow

CONTRIBUTE TO THE NEWSLETTER

Submit original articles or story ideas to the editor at patodrisk@gmail.com.

Send image-file photos of birds or bird outings to the photo editor at jcesten@gmail.com.

Editors reserve the right to accept and edit suitable articles and photos for publication.

NEWSLETTER ADVERTISING

The Lark Bunting does not accept or contain paid advertising. DFO **AdBIRDtisements** are FREE to club members to seek or sell bird-related equipment, supplies, books and decorative items (artwork, photos, clothing, note cards, etc.).

- Ads must include name, email and/or telephone number, and may include weblink if items offered online
- Ads may be edited for inappropriate content or excessive length (125-word limit); ONE photo or image per ad
- Ads do not carry over each month. To renew, resubmit by next deadline
- Available *only* to DFO members
- Deadline: last day of month except January and June (*The Lark Bunting* does not publish in February and July)

Send AdBIRDtisement materials to editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com.

Next deadline: Saturday, September 30





A community of birders, learning and acting together for avian wildlife

Denver Field Ornithologists is an all-volunteer organization that conducts hundreds of free birdwatching field trips throughout the year and welcomes participation and membership by all. DFO promotes enjoyment of nature, the study of birds, and protection of them and their habitats in greater Denver and beyond.

In addition to field trips, evening programs and birding workshops, DFO conducts community science in the field, including the spring Hawk Watch raptor migration count on Dinosaur Ridge.

DFO awards grants annually for bird-related research, education and conservation projects in Colorado. For more information, visit the [Research, Education & Conservation Grants](#) page on the DFO website.

DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and financial contributions to DFO's three giving funds are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

DFO OFFICERS

President

Sharon Tinianow
sharontinianow@gmail.com

Vice President

Matt Rodgers (Interim)
mattrodgers79@gmail.com

Secretary

Nathan Bond
dfobirds.secretary@gmail.com

Treasurer

Kathy Holland
kcloudview@comcast.net

Past President

Susan Blansett
susan.blansett@gmail.com

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Karen Drozda
drozforte@aol.com

Mary Geder
mfg5000@live.com

Cyndy Johnson
cyndyjohnson28@msn.com

Tina Jones
tjcalliope@hotmail.com

Roger Koester
koester1949@gmail.com

Patrick O'Driscoll
patodrisk@gmail.com

Janet Peters
j.f.peters58@gmail.com

Courtney Rella
dr.cawtney@gmail.com

David Suddjian
dsuddjian@gmail.com

Bill Turner
toursbyturner@aol.com

Elaine Wagner
ewagner1000@yahoo.com

COMMITTEE CHAIRS & ROLES

Better Birding Skills

Sharon Tinianow (acting)
sharontinianow@gmail.com

Communications & Outreach

Michael Fernandez (acting)
mikefernandez@icloud.com

Conservation

Courtney Rella
dr.cawtney@gmail.com

Field Trips

David Suddjian
davidsuddjian@gmail.com

Finance

Roger Koester
koester1949@gmail.com

Grants

Jill Boice
jill@booksandcats.net

Hawk Watch

Janet Peters
j.f.peters58@gmail.com

Membership

Cyndy Johnson
cyndyjohnson28@msn.com

Nominations

Mary Geder
mfg5000@live.com

Programs Director

Bill Turner
toursbyturner@aol.com

Historian

Kristine Haglund
kahaglund1@aol.com

Web Administrator

Jim Esten
admin@dfobirds.org

Zoom Coordinator

Jim Esten
admin@dfobirds.org

DFO ONLINE

Website

dfobirds.org

Facebook Group

facebook.com/groups/dfobirds

Instagram

instagram.com/denverfieldornithologists

CONTACT

Email

df0.commsgroup@gmail.com

Via website (at bottom of home page)

dfobirds.org

US Mail

Attn: Kathy Holland, Treasurer, DFO
351 E Caley Ave, Centennial, CO 80121-2201

LEARN MORE

Membership — Join or Renew

dfobirds.org/DFO/Membership.aspx

Field Trips — Explore / Sign Up

dfobirds.org/FieldTrips.aspx

Volunteering

dfobirds.org/DFO/Volunteer.aspx

Charitable Giving

dfobirds.org/DFO/Donations.aspx

DFO Merch Store

zazzle.com/store/official_dfo_shop



FROM THE PRESIDENT

Keeping abreast of bird news: the sad, the bad — and we hope, some glad

Sharon Tinianow

News headlines are seldom “good news.” Most of the time, what makes the newsfeed, the telecast, or the front page is the sad, the unfortunate, and the downright devastating. I know a few folks who won’t read news first thing in the morning because it starts their day on a negative note. Some have stopped reading the news at all.

I can empathize, but to not stay abreast of what’s going on in the world, the nation and here at home feels irresponsible. Hard as it sometimes may be, paying attention to what’s happening in our world is a duty, not an option. Playing ostrich (the proverbial “head in the sand”) denies one the opportunity to reflect, to learn and to be stirred to action. In that spirit, let me draw your attention to a few recent headlines from the world you and I share, the realm of birds and birding.

First, the sad: **John Fielder**, the prolific photographer of Colorado’s many amazing landscapes, died Aug. 11 at age 73 after a battle with pancreatic cancer. For all of us who cherish our state’s wild and scenic places, it’s a tragic loss. There will be no new Fielder images or opportunities to see and hear him in person. (Had his condition not worsened this summer, we would have welcomed him live via Zoom for a special DFO monthly program in August.) I feel privileged to have heard Fielder speak on two occasions. He shared many tales about how he captured the magnificent scenery of Colorado. His book, *John Fielder’s Best of Colorado*, is one of my resources for planning home-state road trips.

His stirring works of photographic art will live on, thanks to his generosity this year in donating more than 6,000 of his images to History Colorado for the enjoyment of and use by the people of Colorado. Fielder did so to inspire us to be advocates for wild places. In an opinion-page essay in *The Denver Post* last January to announce his gift, he wrote this: “Humanity will not survive without the preservation of biodiversity on Earth, and I have been honored to use my photography to influence people and legislation to protect our natural and rural environments.” His images were partly responsible for the passage of the 1992 Great Outdoors Colorado Trust Fund Initiative and the Colorado Wilderness Act of 1993. Fielder’s donation and its purpose align with DFO’s mission to protect birds and their habitats.



Continued on page 6

Photos top to bottom:
John Fielder (1950-2023)
Pawnee Buttes with clouds (John Fielder / History Colorado)

What's more, before he died, Fielder acted as curator of an exhibition of his work now on display in the History Colorado Center in downtown Denver. You can read about the exhibit and also explore (and even copy) Fielder's donated works on the "[Revealed: John Fielder's Favorite Place](#)" page on History Colorado's website.

Second, the bad news: A new article in the scientific journal *Communications Earth & Environment* announced the "catastrophic," nearly complete failure of the 2022 Emperor Penguin nesting season in one region of Antarctica because the sea ice shelf collapsed before the young had fledged. Such a widespread failure of sea ice is unprecedented — yet another impact of climate change on a bird species. You can read the article free [online at the journal Nature's website](#).

While Emperor Penguins have adapted to local sea ice failures by moving to more stable locations nearby, they cannot move when the failure is on a regional scale like this one. Young birds, not seaworthy until they fledge, drown when sea ice breaks up too early.

This species' outlook is bleak. If current warming trends persist, more than 90 percent of Emperor colonies will be quasi-extinct by the end of this century. Even though each of us can reduce our contribution to atmospheric carbon, individual actions won't be enough. There is no quick fix. It is easy to feel powerless to help.

Which leads, thirdly, to some (perhaps) glad news: At a recent meeting of DFO's Conservation Committee, chair **Courtney Rella** told us of a learning opportunity that can help prepare us to take action to address climate change. It's a free seminar offered by the Boulder County Nature Association and the Center for Sustainable Landscapes and Communities, and it focuses on the complex and intertwined effects of climate change on the water cycle between Earth and the atmosphere. It is scheduled for Saturday, Sept. 23, 9 a.m.- 3 p.m. at the Sustainability, Energy and Environment Complex at CU Boulder. You can learn more about it and sign up on the [nature association's website](#) to attend.

This is just one of many learning opportunities that can prepare us to take on climate change directly. DFO's most recent monthly program with Colorado naturalist and author **Mary Taylor Young** is another example. (If you missed her live Zoom presentation Aug. 28, the recording is available on the [Past Programs page](#) of the DFO website.) We need to educate ourselves about the issues if we are going to advocate for meaningful change.

All these news stories fall under the broader topic of conservation, a DFO priority. What's good for the environment is generally good for the birds, too. I am happy to share that the news from DFO is good. The Hawk Watch Committee had a great year counting and observing migrating raptors from atop Dinosaur Ridge. You can catch up with the 2023 results on the [Hawk Watch page](#) of the DFO website. Please consider volunteering next spring and donating to support our Hawk Watch efforts.

With the Conservation Committee reactivating under Rella's leadership, look for bird-related conservation articles in upcoming issues of *The Lark Bunting*. You can learn more about what the committee is up to on the [Conservation page](#) of the DFO website as well.

While you stay abreast of the news, I know you'll find time to enjoy some fall birding as southward migration picks up. Don't forget to sign up for DFO's excellent monthly programs in September, October and November, as well as the next popular "BIRD BOMBS" mini-webinars on bird identification. Let's all continue to learn, be inspired, and act together.

Sharon Tinianow, who joined DFO in 2016, was elected club president in April 2023. A former editor of *The Lark Bunting*, she began birding in an ornithology class in college. Sharon retired as assistant director of CU Boulder's Museum of Natural History.



Emperor Penguins (Ian Duffy via Wikipedia)

DFO News Notes

Patrick O'Driscoll

Got blurbs on birds? Share with **DFO News Notes**: Colorado birding newsbits, eBird milestones, tales from the trail, birding life (and life birds!), etc. Email your items, photos, links and anything else to patodrisk@gmail.com.

RED-TAILED? BUTEO ID IS NEXT "BIRD BOMBS" TOPIC SEPTEMBER 14

What's the most-heard guess among birders about a Colorado raptor just spotted in flight? "It's probably a Red-tailed." That's also the title of DFO's next free BIRD BOMBS bird ID mini-webinar, which will go off on **Thursday, Sept. 14, at 7 p.m. MDT** via Zoom. **It's Probably a Red-tail** will focus on our most common, ubiquitous, highly variable and challenging hawk, which serves as an ID gateway for our many Buteos and other raptors. Why is this birding wisdom so right on? [Click here to register](#) for this free webinar to find out! You can also check out DFO's video library of almost 20 past BIRD BOMBS mini-webinars on the [BIRD BOMBS page](#) of the DFO website.



POTLUCK MEMORIAL FOR DFO'S PATTY ECHELMAYER IS SEPTEMBER 23

Friends and admirers of the late, beloved **Patty Echelmeyer**, DFO past president (1968-70) and field trip leader: Mark your calendars for a "celebration of life" and potluck on Saturday, **Sept. 23, 4-7 p.m. MDT** in **Prospect Park**, 4005 Kipling Street in the Wheat Ridge Greenbelt. Patty's family will host the potluck (5 p.m.) at the park picnic shelter and provide main course and drinks (lemonade, water, soda). Guests are asked

to bring a side dish or dessert, and memories of Patty! Please RSVP to Patty's grandson **Justin Fosha** at 970-531-8490 or jfosha@gmail.com.



DFO'S AUGUST FIELD TRIP RESULTS: 19 OUTINGS, 184 SPECIES

DFO field trips visited 20 Colorado counties in August, and the most abundant bird seen on our 19 outings was the state bird (and this newsletter's namesake), the Lark Bunting (1,745 individuals reported). For a full rundown on DFO's August trips, read this eBird report: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/149145>. Lark Buntings were the most numerous of 184 total species recorded on 108 eBird checklists. Meanwhile, several new trips were recently added to DFO's September field trip calendar, including Cherry Creek and Roxborough state parks and Lair O' the Bear Park in Jefferson County. Check out all the upcoming trips on the DFO Website's [Upcoming Field Trips](#) page.

BANDING HUMMINGBIRDS . . . ON BOULDER'S KGNU RADIO?

At the peak of hummingbird season in the foothills of Boulder County, certified hummingbird banders **Steve** and **Deb Bouricius** see at least 15,000 hummers *a day* at three dozen feeders** in their yard and a neighbor's yard in Peaceful Valley,

Continued on page 8

CO. In July, Boulder County Audubon held a [hummingbird banding workshop](#) led by the Bouriciuses and fellow bird bander **Scott Rashid**. KGNU Community Radio's *How on Earth* science show was there to record "a truly extraordinary episode" for listeners. You can listen to "A Hummingbird Extravaganza" at the radio station's [online archives](#).

*** And how much sugar water do the Bouriciuses produce daily to fill their feeders at peak season? Nine GALLONS.*

DENVER AUDUBON'S 12TH ANNUAL HOOTENANNY SEPTEMBER 30

HOOTenanny Owl & Music Festival, Denver Audubon's largest family event of the year and only owl festival in metro Denver, is set for **10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 30** at **Audubon's Kingery Nature Center** south of Chatfield SP off South Wadsworth Boulevard. The festival will include three live owl demonstrations from Nature's Educators, crafts for kids, a "hidden owl" scavenger hunt in the center's Native Plant Gardens, owl pellet dissections, live folk music from the local band Nearly There, and educational booths from nonprofit partners including Colorado Parks & Wildlife, U.S. Forest Service, and Bird Conservancy of the Rockies. "Early-bird" ticketed admission is \$12 adults/teens 13 and up, \$8 children ages 3-12, and free age 2 and under. To register and buy tickets, go to the event's [registration page](#) online.

BIRD CONSERVANCY MARKS 35 YEARS WITH NIGHT FOR THE BIRDS OCTOBER 6

Bird Conservancy of the Rockies' biggest fundraising event of the year, "A Night for the Birds," is scheduled for **Friday, Oct. 6, 6-9 p.m. MDT** in the **Denver Museum of Nature & Science**. The live event will feature games and trivia, hors d'oeuvres, guest speakers, and live and silent auction. Proceeds, of course, support the conservancy's mission to conserve birds and their habitats with integrated work in science, education and land stewardship. To buy tickets (\$60) for this fundraiser, visit the event's [ticketing website](#).

BIRD-FRIENDLY SE COLORADO RANCH SHOWS HOW TO SURVIVE WILDFIRE

In April 2022, 9,000 of May Ranch's 15,500 acres were scorched by the Big Sandy Creek wildfire, which whipped the southeast

Colorado cattle spread near Lamar with 60 mph winds. But sustainability measures put in place years earlier by the May family are paying dividends in swift recovery of a model prairie landscape. Native grasses, healthy wetlands, and abundant birdlife — from Lesser Prairie Chicken and Burrowing Owl to Long-billed Curlew and the rare Black Rail — all have made the ranch a leader in the conservation ranching movement. They and endangered Black-footed Ferrets coexist with the Mays' herd of purebred Limousin cattle. The positive outcome after a potentially disastrous grassland fire is chronicled in a feature-length article, "AFTER THE FIRE," in summer 2023 issue of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's *Living Bird* magazine. The article was written by **Michael Booth**, a longtime Denver news reporter who covers environment issues for *The Colorado Sun*, the Denver-based e-newspaper. [Click here](#) to read the complete story, with photos, from Cornell's *All About Birds* news website.



WHO'S WHO OF COLORADO RAPTORS @ BARR LAKE OCTOBER 14

The Brighton-based [Raptor Education Foundation](#) and Colorado Parks & Wildlife are teaming to present a new course on the state's birds of prey: The Who's Who of Colorado Raptors. The course is scheduled from **9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Oct. 14** at the **Barr Lake SP Nature Center** and will be presented by CPW senior volunteer raptor monitor **Karen Metz** and foundation president **Anne Price**. Audio-visual enhancement will include photos by Metz and a dozen of the foundation's live raptors for up-close viewing, comparisons and picture-taking. Coffee, tea and other morning refreshments will be provided. Questions? Contact organizers at 303-680-8500. The course cost is \$70 for early-bird registration through Sept. 15, and \$80 thereafter. To register, go to the [course sign-up page](#) on the foundation website.



Scott Rashid with juvenile Great Horned Owl

FALL PROGRAM PREVIEW

Owls of Northern Colorado

Scott Rashid
Monday, September 18
7 p.m. MDT via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

Whoohoo knew? . . . that 11 of the 19 species of owl found in the US occur in northern Colorado? Who else but **Scott Rashid**, that's hoooh. The veteran Colorado owl researcher, bander and rehabilitator will tell a DFO audience all about them at our next monthly program meeting via Zoom on **Monday, Sept. 18 at 7 p.m. MDT**. (Please note: This program is on the **third Monday** evening because the usual fourth-Monday date in September conflicts with the Yom Kippur holiday observance.)

In "Owls of Northern Colorado," Rashid will discuss the natural history of each of these species, touching on their habitat preferences, courtship, nesting, feeding, fledging and beyond. (For the record, those magnificent 11 owl species are Barn, Boreal, Burrowing, Eastern Screech, Flammulated, Great Horned, Long-eared, Northern Saw-whet, Northern Pygmy, Short-eared and Snowy.)

Rashid may know them better than anyone in the state, having worked with owls here for more than 30 years. As creator and director of the nonprofit [Colorado Avian Research and Rehabilitation Institute](#) (CARRI) in Estes Park, he and his team have placed more than 130 nest boxes for the various cavity-nesting species they study. Many of those nests have cameras, enabling the researchers to monitor nesting activity without bothering the birds.

Rashid founded CARRI in 2011, rehabilitating injured and orphaned birds in and around Estes Park and Rocky Mountain NP. CARRI operates a banding station each fall, capturing and banding both Northern Saw-whet and Boreal owls after dark. Since 2007, Rashid and his team have captured more than 350 Northern Saw-whets and 20 Boreals. His DFO presentation will include images and videos of their banding process as well as of adults feeding young, owlets in their nests, and the prey their parents bring them.

Besides his field research, Rashid has been painting, illustrating and writing about birds for nearly 35 years. His avian passion was sparked in his boyhood years in Wisconsin. In college, he developed a unique painting style that combines Cubism and Realism. His Cubist side shows multiple views of his subjects in each painting, but his Realist side seeks to make them identifiable and, well, realistic. The one-of-a-kind result depicts birds in a way singularly distinctive in the art world.

Two years after receiving his state and federal bird banding permits in 1992, Rashid created a banding program at the YMCA of the Rockies outside Estes Park. It still operates today, the most popular program at the largest YMCA in the world, with thousands of guest-visitors each year. Nine years ago, Rashid and his volunteers banded their 10,000th bird there. In 1994, he became a licensed bird rehabilitator, caring for injured birds and returning hundreds back into the wild, including raptors, songbirds, hummingbirds and corvids.

Since 1998, when he began studying Northern Pygmy-Owls in Rocky Mountain NP, Rashid has located 18 different nests in and outside the park. His first book, *Small Mountain Owls*, was the first ever published about it and Northern Saw-whet,

Continued on page 10

Flammulated and Boreal owls. In 2004, he located the park's first Flammulated Owl nest. He also has found Northern Saw-whet Owl nests inside and outside the park, and confirmed that the Boreal Owl nests in the park.

Since 2014, CARRI's Barn Owl research project has increased the species' numbers and proved the birds' huge benefit in preying on small, destructive rodents. In addition, with help from CARRI members, Rashid has built and placed more than 135 nest boxes for American Kestrels across a 72-mile stretch from Arvada to the Wyoming border.

His other books include *The Great Horned Owl: An In-depth Study* and *Northern Goshawk, the Gray Ghost: Habits, Habitat, and Rehabilitation*, both published in 2015, and *Exploring the World of the Barn Owl: (An intimate look into their secretive lives)* in 2019.



Scott's painting of four kinds of owls
Scott Rashid

FEEDBACK

YOUR VIEWS

The Lark Bunting welcomes your feedback — criticisms and compliments, praise and scorn, and anything in between. Email yours to editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com or text him at 303-885-6955.

Patty E: "A walking hug"

I am writing this as I sob for the loss of **Patty Echelmeyer**. I had not heard of her passing until I read your remembrance (*The Lark Bunting*, [September 2023, p. 14](#)), and I hadn't spoken to her since last fall.

Patty and **Bill Echelmeyer** went to college with my folks and re-connected at a Penn State alumni function in Denver back in the '50s. Mom and Patty were best friends right up until Mom passed away in July 2021.

The joke of our families was that our parents raised us in the back of a station wagon, as nearly every weekend we were out looking for arrowheads, going to state parks, birding, junking or rambling. **Randy** and **Keith** [Patty's daughter and son] were like brother and sister to us three Walker kids.

When I returned to Denver as a college student, Patty was always there for me. When I was an adult, she took me under her wing to Tuesday Birders and other field trips to fuel my birding fire. Patty was truly my spirit mother. Thank you for the lovely tribute.

I know she and **Bob** [Buttery] were so happy together. Her Christmas card last year had a picture of them together. They were so darn cute. Patty was a walking hug!

Tamie Walker Bulow

Harlingen, TX

[DFO president, 2005-07]



Abby Burk

FALL PROGRAM PREVIEW

Water Flows Together: Opportunities for Birds and People in 2023

Abby Burk
Monday, October 23
7 p.m. MST via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)



Tree planting restoration work along Dolores River
Abby Burk

Water connects us all, humans and birds alike. Clean and reliable water supplies and healthy, flowing rivers are essential both to people's ways of life in Colorado and to the 400-plus species of birds that spend some or all of the year within its borders.

But with rivers so essential to Colorado's future, their stewardship falls to humankind alone. It touches all water uses, and users, including avian wildlife. All of us, whether birders or not, have roles in sustaining this water future for all life.

Against that sobering backdrop, join **Abby Burk** of Audubon Rockies for an engaging October evening program about our state's freshwater ecosystems, current issues involving Colorado water, and what it all means for birds and people. Burk's Zoom presentation, "Water Flows Together: Opportunities for Birds and People in 2023," is set for **Monday, Oct. 23 at 7 p.m. MDT.**

Burk is senior manager of the Western Rivers program for Audubon Rockies, the Fort Collins-based regional office of National Audubon for Colorado, Wyoming and Utah. In this role, she says, she is "committed to advancing riparian habitat and stream resiliency through advocacy and action." She professes a lifetime of love for rivers, particularly the Colorado River and its tributaries.

Her talk comes in a pivotal year for water planning in Colorado. In January, the state water board released an updated [Colorado Water Plan](#) that highlights water conservation as a necessary starting point for meeting the state's water needs. During review of the draft plan in 2022, Burk and other advocates also pushed hard for making river health a priority. "Stream restoration clarity around water rights was front and center during the legislative session," Burk says. "We were on the front lines. But there's more work needed."

An expert in ecological management and "an award-winning educator and river corridor diplomat," Burk holds a bachelor's degree in biology and an interdisciplinary master's degree with concentrations in ecology and hydrology. She is an avid whitewater kayaker and enjoys time on western rivers as often as possible.

NOTE:

The program originally scheduled for Oct. 23, *Birding the Lower Rio Grande Valley: Top 5 Hotspots and More* with **Tamie Bulow**, has been postponed until January 2024.

Watch here for details later this fall.

FALL PROGRAM PREVIEW

Wildlife, Wetlands and the Everglades

Lauren Jonaitis and Stephanie Clements

Monday, November 27

7 p.m. MST via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)



These are perilous times for the Everglades. South Florida's birding-rich "River of Grass" seems in constant turmoil, whether it's a hidden legion of alien, wildlife-killing Burmese pythons run amok or the unending power struggle over the control and quality of water and the threat of encroaching development across the region.

On the Monday after Thanksgiving, DFO's final evening program of the autumn 2023 season will explore the rich history and science of this vast, iconic landscape with two Everglades advocates from the [Tropical Audubon Society](#) of Miami. "Wildlife, Wetlands and the Everglades" (**Nov. 27, 7 p.m. MST via Zoom**) will feature Tropical Audubon senior Conservation director **Lauren Jonaitis** and Education & Advocacy director **Stephanie Clements**.

"You will gain knowledge about the birds and other wildlife who depend on the Everglades habitats and discover why this ecosystem is so important ecologically, culturally and economically to Florida," said Jonaitis, who works on the "project delivery team" for several Everglades restoration projects. She joined Tropical

Audubon last year to focus on expanding and amplifying the organization's role and reach across South Florida. Previously, she worked for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to reduce artificial light pollution effects on sea turtles and their coastal nesting habitat.

Jonaitis also worked in private industry as an environmental/coastal scientist, focused on permitting and dune restoration and maintenance. Currently, she is vice president of Policy for the Society of Conservation Biology North America. She is also the society's Communications chair. She holds a bachelor's degree in zoology from State University of New York at Oswego and a master's in conservation and population biology from Bowling Green State University in OH.

Clements oversees Tropical Audubon's flagship Ambassador Program, which cultivates volunteer environmental advocates across Miami. She is now working to broaden its membership among underrepresented and excluded communities. She earned her doctorate in biology from the University of Miami, where her dissertation focused on conservation of reptiles and amphibians in human-modified landscapes of Miami and Costa Rica. In her doctoral work, Clements studied both native and non-native reptiles and amphibians in the Everglades and other prominent South Florida ecosystems. She worked previously as an interpretive ranger in the National Park Service, field manager for an environmental advocacy group, and as a children's educational instructor at a zoo.

MONTHLY PROGRAMS

If you missed it: DFO's August program

The DFO website contains a video archive of our monthly fall, winter and spring lecture programs on the Zoom platform. If you could not “attend” our most recent program live, click the link below to view the recording.



zoom

Thanks to DFO historian
Kris Haglund for
curating and posting the
program videos on the
DFO website on the
[Past Programs](#) page.



AUGUST 28

Bluebird Seasons: Witnessing Climate Change in My Piece of the Wild Mary Taylor Young

WATCH ONLINE

Mary Taylor Young, a prolific Colorado nature writer and naturalist, discusses her climate change epiphany on a 37-acre ranchette she shares with her husband in southern Colorado. She recounts with photos how they built their cabin and a string of bluebird nesting boxes, and anecdotally observed changes on the landscape through the years: “The trees began dying . . . the meadows were dry and brown . . . the wildlife were changing.” More birds usually found farther south and at lower elevation. Fresh bear scat in January when bears should be hibernating. She realized clues to the “gathering storm” of global warming were within decades of nature journal entries since 1995. Those observations became her book, *Bluebird Seasons: Witnessing Climate Change In My Piece of the Wild*.





FIELD TRIPS IN FOCUS

In Focus: We need DFO birders birding pix!

Denver Field Ornithologists annually leads many hundreds of birders on memorable field trips across Colorado. Every outing's checklist is permanently recorded on eBird, often with photos of that outing's best bird sightings.

But what about pictures of the birders themselves? This new feature, ***Field Trips in Focus***, will share glimpses of DFO field trippers doing what we do. Our goal is to preserve in *The Lark Bunting* at least one photo of people birding on every DFO trip.

Want to help? Take a couple of shots of your fellow birders on your next DFO outing: hiking down the trail, stopping together to scope a choice bird, posing for a group snapshot, or just goofing in candid moments. We'll publish the best, including when and where and who was there — like *The Lark Bunting* used to do on printed paper long before eBird became our birding recordkeeper.

Here are some *Field Trips in Focus* shots for August. Now: **Email us your September field trip birder shots** — preferably .JPG or .PNG photo files, in focus, uncropped and unedited, with date/location of your DFO trip. Send to editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com and CC: to photo editor **Jim Esten** at jcesten@gmail.com. Please write "Field Trips in Focus" in the subject field. Deadline is the last day of the month, so the next send date is **no later than Sept. 30**. Again, photos of field trip *people* only, please.

See you on the birding trail . . . and maybe later in the pages of *The Lark Bunting*!



AUGUST 8 Summer Hummer Feeder Watching

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Virginia and Gary Gulakowski,
Kelly Ducham, Linda Purcell,
Billy Harris, Michelle Trotter,
Nicole Iselin, Dave Prentice

Evening hummingbirds
August 8 in David's Ken Caryl yard
(David Suddjian)

Continued on page 15

AUGUST 20
Southeastern Colorado

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Liza and Ajit Antony,
Kenneth Stuckey, Joanna Chau,
Robert Tonge, Patty Boyd,
Jennifer Tonge, Jeff Dawson,
Kelly Ducham, Archer Silverman

Archer Silverman scoping lifer
Sanderlings August 20 at
Upper Queens Reservoir
(David Suddjian)



AUGUST 27
Northeastern Colorado

Leader
Joey Kellner

Participants
Winston Liu, Liza and Ajit
Antony, Courtney Rella,
Joe Chen, Tim Smart,
Susan Blansett, Mark Amershek,
Diane Roberts, Patricia Cullen,
Deb Piranian, Debby Miller,
Angela Trnka

Scoping shorebirds and ducks
August 27 on a Morgan County playa
(Joe Chen)

Another blow: State to end open access at Chico this winter

Patrick O'Driscoll

The Colorado State Land Board's heavy-handed move to restrict future birding at Chico Basin Ranch has taken a yet more onerous twist. The board's staff will institute its drastic 10-weeks-a-year, mornings-only limit on birder access almost a full year sooner than previously stated. Bird-as-you-please access to the property will cease before the end of the upcoming winter of 2023-24.

Severe and questionable limits on birding visits to the 86,000-acre ranch, one of Colorado's richest birdlife locales, were not supposed to start until Jan. 1, 2025. That's the date a new 10-year ranching lease takes effect at the sprawling, state-owned property in El Paso and Pueblo counties. Separate new leases for recreational use (birding, hunting/fishing, hospitality, etc.) were supposed to take effect then as well.

But in email and telephone contacts this summer with Aiken Audubon of Colorado Springs, land board staff indicated they want the birding lease — and new rules with it — to start on March 1, 2024. That's 10 full months before the ranch's livestock and agricultural lease resets. This will abruptly end the present policy of anytime, self-guided access for birders barely two months into the final year of the current lease with Ranchlands, a Chico-based cattle company that welcomes birders on the property.

In fact, board staff wanted to end open-gate entry even sooner, as early as July 1 or Sept. 1 of *this* year, 16-18 months ahead of time. That September bombshell, dropped in a July email, caught everyone by surprise — Aiken, Bird Conservancy of the Rockies (which conducts [spring and fall banding onsite](#)) and even [Ranchlands](#), a family-owned outfit that has allowed birders year-round at Chico Basin for decades. "That freaked us out," says Aiken conservation chair **Linda Hodges**, the club's liaison to the land board. "I told them this can't happen by that date. We couldn't get registration going by then." Her contacts at the land board now say they want a March 1 start date for new birding rules.

The land board's flimsy excuse for halting anytime birder access after Feb. 29, 2024 is so the next ranching lessee will know how the new birding rules operate ahead of taking over agriculture operations in 2025. (*One year ahead?*) But then, the board's rationale for limiting future birding to just 10 weeks a year was already dubious from the start. Board staff has claimed



Sunrise at ranch gate
Patrick O'Driscoll



Ladder-backed Woodpecker
Patrick O'Driscoll

Continued on page 17



Self-serve birding check-in at this kiosk will end this winter
Patrick O'Driscoll

CHICO BASIN *cont from page 16*

the 10-week limit would “minimize conflicts” with the ranching operation. But that is a non-existent “problem”: Both Aiken and Ranchlands say no such conflicts have ever occurred. Birders at Chico Basin rarely even see livestock, ranch staff or vehicles, let alone get in their way.

To preserve some semblance of future birding at Chico Basin, Aiken had reluctantly consented to a 5-year, no-fee lease to manage birder reservations, user fees and services, with visits limited by the land board to only 20 people a day. (Aiken also has to split any proceeds with the Bird Conservancy.) But as an all-volunteer chapter of National Audubon, Aiken needs months, if not all of next year, to prepare. It must create a system to take reservations and manage visitors, carry two kinds of insurance, collect entry fees, provide portable toilets, signs and other services, and organize volunteers to oversee visits. Although DFO and others have pledged to support Aiken, the birding lease startup remains a heavy lift.

For more than two years, the land board timetable for new leasing at Chico Basin had counted down towards Dec. 31, 2024, the end of the current overall lease with Ranchlands. In a move to exert greater control, board staff has peeled away non-ranching activities (birding and bird banding, hunting/fishing, hospitality) from the next livestock/agriculture lease, activities that Ranchlands has managed without complaint for years.

The land board intends to award the 2025 livestock lease before the end of this year, at least 12 months before the current lease expires. Ranchlands is one of several bidders for that new 10-year ranching contract. But the move to start the non-fee leases for birding and banding 10 months sooner sent the Bird Conservancy scrambling to pay for its banding station work. Ranchlands, which covered those costs until now, no longer will because the land board interfered by pushing up the start of the bird-related leases.

Hodges said the land board had agreed to assign a birding lease to Aiken, but without specifics, leaving it up to board staff to figure out the details. She said that when she submitted Aiken’s application and fee for the birding lease, the paperwork specified a Jan. 1, 2025 starting date. But now a lease awaits Aiken signature, retroactive to Sept. 1 and effective March 1, 2024.

“The first season is going to be very trial-and-error for us,” Hodges said. “People thought they had another spring migration season out there unfettered, and now they don’t.” That includes DFO, which conducts several field trips a year at Chico Basin, a popular destination.

“We’re just going to do as best as we can to figure it out,” Hodges added. “It’s not what we hoped it would be, but we’re just trying to go with the flow, because getting ticked off about it isn’t going to get us anywhere.”

Denver pre-teen is new face on a birding fast track: “I’m just a kid that likes birds”

Patrick O’Driscoll

One year ago this summer, a Denver boy took up birdwatching, another in the wave of newcomers to our field. Using an old monocular that day in August 2022, he spied four species in Denver City Park, a 4-minute bike ride from home. Then he joined eBird to post his first checklist.

Soon after, the pre-teen began his own birding blog. Not much later, he tried to start a birding club at school but got no takers. Undeterred, he began research on a [personal online field guide](#) to the birds of Colorado, which he figures will take 10-15 years to complete. (“It’s going to be more of a database, kind of like Cornell’s *Birds of the World*,” he says matter-of-factly.) Then in mid-December, what the boy first thought was a Song Sparrow in his backyard hedge sent him to the internet to make sure.

Two days before New Year’s, he reported back on an eBird checklist: “This little guy has been hanging around our house for around three weeks now. He took a little while to ID but the yellow beak and the orange stripes and the grayish cap gave it away. If you want to see him please come by.”

And so, for the next 10 weeks starting New Year’s Day, sixth-grader **Archer Silverman**, age 11, welcomed dozens of adult readers of eBird’s [Colorado Rare Bird Alert](#) to view his Denver winter rarity, a Fox Sparrow.

Big year, bigger ambitions

The bird boy wonder was just getting started. Within a couple of weeks, Archer had begun his own Colorado “big year” — rather ambitious for someone who can’t drive a car until 2027. But “ambitious” seems to be his middle name. After setting a target of 300 species, he’s already at 292, with fall migration just underway.

Before turning 12 in April, he joined Denver Field Ornithologists. (He also got a scope for his birthday.) That month, Archer joined half a dozen adult DFO’ers on an overnight trip to view Gunnison Sage-Grouse. Then in May, he created a WhatsApp group for birders in City Park, his “patch” five blocks from home.

“I am definitely committed,” he says, like a fanboy talking [Pokémon](#), not pelicans. “Birding is basically what I’ve been doing a lot.” His parents and grandparents try to shuttle him to the birds when they can, but Archer is already a world-class networker for the rest. No bashful pre-teen, he bums rides and tagalongs with a growing network of grownup birders and friends.

“I’ll tell my husband. ‘God, Archer sends me texts twice a week asking to take him birding,’ ” **Kathy Holland** of Littleton says with mock exhaustion. “My husband says, ‘Well, he’s gotta try. You can always say no.’ ”



Archer Silverman at Plaster Reservoir, Broomfield
Patrick O’Driscoll

Continued on page 19

“Leaps and bounds”

Holland, who is also DFO's treasurer, went to see that Fox Sparrow last Jan. 5. Archer wasn't home, but his mom was greeting birders, sometimes with homemade cookies. Chatting with **Emily Silverman**, Holland offered to take her son birding sometime. Hours later, the boy phoned, and they met and birded two days later at Denver's Bluff Lake Nature Center. Over the next 10 days, Holland took Archer to see Long-eared Owls at Cherry Creek SP, Barrow's Goldeneye at Denver's Overland Park, and “lots of lifers” at Lake Pueblo SP. Days before his 12th birthday, she took him on that Gunnison Sage-Grouse trip.

“He knew some stuff, but there were so many birds he hadn't seen, and I knew where to look,” says Holland, who logged 362 species in Colorado last year. “He's gone forward in leaps and bounds since. He wants to get it right. He says he's studying birds for like two hours a day along with everything else he's doing. He's very enthusiastic, and he's infectious.”

Archer absorbs avian information like a sponge, and he converses easily with adult birders about, say, flycatcher field marks or the different subspecies of Snow Goose. (“There are two and they are basically impossible to distinguish from each other,” he declares, though he tries.)

Now a seventh grader at Denver's Hill Campus of Arts & Sciences middle school, he watches eBird alerts for rare birds he might be able to chase after class. In the evenings, “I try to finish my school work early and then go online and research about birds, range maps and all that.” On his bedroom wall are National Geographic bird migration posters. “It's kind of fun, there are so many birds on them that I can still look at and see a new one each day.”

Of her son, Emily Silverman says, “When he likes something, he really **LIKES** something. From the time he was born, he's always loved animals and ecosystems. His first sentence was, ‘I love animals.’ He has hundreds of little plastic animals, and he used to arrange them according to species and habitat in all these circles and lines.”

Continued on page 20



Archer in his new T-shirt



Updating his eBird checklist



Bird Boy Archer with Kathy Holland, 2nd from left, and other DFO folk on Gunnison Sage-Grouse trip

Family, community support

Once Archer discovered birds, “you’ve never seen an 11 or 12-year-old get himself up early on Saturday to be in City Park,” Emily adds. His “spark” bird was a Trumpeter Swan cygnet, seen on a family vacation trip in 2022 to Sun River, OR. “During the 20-plus hours we were driving back to Denver, he was counting the birds out the window.”

After he found the Fox Sparrow in their yard, the response was heartening: “The more that we welcomed people,” Emily says, “the more the birding community welcomed us.” Not that Archer’s family — which also includes dad **Josh Mattison** and sister, **Solia**, age 9 — doesn’t encourage him, too. “I feel like the role of a parent is to embrace the interests of your kid,” Emily adds. “He goes birding with everybody in the family now. We’ve all jumped in. I wouldn’t say any of us have gotten the bug like he has, but having the Archer bug, I would do anything to support him.”

“Sometimes I go birding with my grandparents and my parents. They’re not super into birds, but they like to be with me,” Archer adds without a hint of ego. He also has two best friends who, his mother says, “are just amazing humans, too.” And last spring, Archer made friends with a 12-year-old birder he met while chasing a rare Golden-winged Warbler. They’ve birded together since, including to see the state-record Limpkin at Ramah SWA on July 4, the last morning it was sighted there.

Typical 12-year-olds aren’t looking much beyond next week or next month. But Archer Silverman envisions big things years ahead: Many more birding trips once he can drive himself, and then a gap year to do a “real” birding big year between high school and college. With higher education at least six years away, he dreams of Cornell and its famous Lab of Ornithology, maybe for a graduate degree in ornithology — but first, a bachelor’s degree in wildlife biology from Colorado State University would be fine.

Archer’s eBird profile begins: “I’m just a kid that likes birds.” Clearly, the kid’s already got grown-up ambitions. “I do want this to be kind of my life’s path,” he says. “I feel like this is what I’m meant to do.”

2023's DFO grantees tackle climate effects on Colorado species, habitat

Patrick O'Driscoll

A bird study at a popular local park and several research projects on Front Range chickadees, swallows and upland owls are among the 2023 recipients of grants from DFO's Research, Education, and Conservation Fund.

Thanks to the generosity of DFO members and other donors, the five winning applicants are receiving a combined \$9,050 in financial aid. The grants, recommended by the DFO Grants Committee and approved last February by the DFO Board of Directors, are the largest single-year total since the fund was created in 1994.

The following are newsletter summaries of the awardees' research proposals. Each grantee is expected to report back to DFO members next year on project status and results.

SARA GARCIA

PhD student in Ecology & Evolutionary Biology
University of Colorado Boulder
\$2,000

ASSESSING ENVIRONMENTAL HETEROGENEITY AMONG BARN SWALLOW NESTING SITES

(with co-investigators **Heather Kenny-Duddela** and **Rebecca Safran**)



Garcia's Barn Swallow research aims to analyze whether and how "site-level and nest-level environments" in Boulder County, and the related development of the birds' nestlings there, may vary across a range of urban and rural locations. Her project outline notes that Barn Swallows "are especially relevant for studies related to urbanization" because they are "highly mobile and prolific" in human-built

environments. (Boulder County populations have surged by 600 percent since the mid-20th century and are forecast to grow 1 percent annually over the next half-century, both "drastic indicators of increasing urbanization.")

At the same time, as aerial insect-eaters, they're also "highly sensitive to climate change as their environments change"; in such cases, the species has "been found to be decreasing in numbers." Preliminary data that Garcia collected last year (May-September 2022) already found variation related to temperature fluctuations at nest levels. Her project outline asserts that collecting more data for various "abiotic" or physical factors "is necessary to understand the degree of variation across these microenvironments." This year's work (March-October) includes monitoring swallow nest sites across the county. With booming urban growth, understanding how species that reproduce and live in these environments are affected is critically important.

JACK DOMEIKA

Avian ecology researcher
in Organismal Biology & Ecology
Colorado College, Colorado Springs
\$2,000

ESTIMATING THE EFFECT OF HABITAT QUALITY ON GENE FLOW, GENETIC DIVERSITY, AND FITNESS IN FLAMMULATED OWLS (*PSILOSCOPS FLAMMEOLUS*)

(with co-investigators **Maybellene Gamboa** and **Brian Linkhart**)



Domeika's research aims to use genomic sequencing to advance understanding of Colorado populations of Flammulated Owl (*Psiloscops flammeolus*), a small, elusive and highly unique migratory species vulnerable "to rapid climate change and an indicator species in old growth forests." He hypothesizes that the most fit males inhabit higher quality central patches of old-growth habitat — where, in turn, they attract more females willing to conceive and hatch young in couplings outside of traditional mated-pair relationships (known as "extra-pair paternity," or EPP). Any resulting

Continued on page 22

“positive relationship between fitness and habitat quality” would suggest high genetic diversity in the middle of broader nesting areas.

The idea is to quantify genetic diversity in Flammulated Owls “to better predict ecosystem health” and guide efforts to stop habitat fragmentation that can wipe out local populations. In this regard, as migrators, Flammulateds are “important indicators” of habitat health here in the West and in central Mexico where they winter. This makes their experience invaluable to those who manage fragmented landscapes.

Colorado College’s Linkhart Ornithology Lab has gathered data on Flammulateds and their habitat in Pike National Forest for more than 40 years, with breeding and blood-sample data for more than 20 years. This project will extract genomic DNA from those samples in analyses of about 350 individual owls across breeding seasons. The end result will be “genomic libraries” of data to be sequenced and compared with habitat metrics to test the hypothesis that Flammulated males with prime central territories father more “extra-pair” offspring.

AJAY PATEL

PhD student in Ecology & Evolutionary Biology
University of Colorado Boulder
\$1,500

EXPLORING THE GEOGRAPHIC CONSISTENCY OF THE GENETIC BASIS OF SPATIAL COGNITION IN MOUNTAIN CHICKADEES

(with co-investigator **Scott A. Taylor**)



Patel’s research seeks to learn if “spatial cognition” — how birds learn about their environment and how to obtain food, water and shelter within it — can help predict how Mountain Chickadees in Colorado might adapt to changing climate and other future conditions. He says the genetics of spatial cognition in Mountain Chickadees have never been examined in the two geographic regions where different

subspecies occur: California’s Sierra Nevada range and points west, and regions east of the Sierra, including the Colorado Rockies. He also calls it an opportunity to evaluate “genetic parallelism” in distinct populations long isolated from each other (between 610,000 and 1.53 million years).

The project began capturing birds last spring at nest boxes in the long-running Boulder Chickadee Study area at CU Boulder’s Mountain Research Station in Nederland, CO. The aim was to sample as many as possible, then choose 50 for blood-sampling, banding and tagging with transponders. Those devices were linked to radio-ID-equipped feeder arrays far enough apart to draw different flocks of foragers to score for their spatial cognition traits. The species relies on these abilities to survive by caching plentiful seeds in fall for recovery in winter. Some Mountain Chickadees in higher, harsher environments have shown enhanced spatial learning and have larger memory zones in their brains (hippocampus).

SUSAN BENNETT

Environmental interpreter
City of Wheat Ridge, CO
\$1,600

TABOR LAKE BIRD POPULATION STUDY

(with Metropolitan State University, Denver project partners Biology Prof. **Christy Carello** [avian monitoring/student surveys] and Earth/Atmospheric Science Sr. Lecturer **Sara Schliemann** [student soil sample collection/analysis])



Years of habitat loss (human development), increased metro Denver population, and heavier use of Wheat Ridge Greenbelt have put the Tabor Lake colonial bird island and other rookery locations elsewhere at risk. Trees

on the rookery island are stressed and dying. In response, the City of Wheat Ridge plans habitat and trail restoration work at Tabor, a former gravel pit along Clear Creek Trail in the greenbelt. Before beginning work on the ground, the city is undertaking this research study to establish a bird population baseline around the lake.

Continued on page 23

Tabor's sizeable island is a communal nesting spot with safety and the lake's food supply (periodically stocked with fish) for Great Blue Heron, Double-crested Cormorant, Black-crowned Night-Heron and Snowy Egret. It has become a popular destination for birders, including those on DFO field trips. The city's work is meant to help update its Open Space Management Plan for the first time since 2002, while serving more residents and visitors and creating new education and conservation opportunities.

This research will document status of habitat, island rookery trees and soil conditions, bird population health, size and sustainability, ID possible island restoration methods, and will incorporate data from DFO Colonial Waterbirds Project, Tuesday Birders, and eBird to enhance understanding of bird populations in the area. Project partners from Metro State will create bird monitoring protocol to be incorporated into management plan, and they will sample and analyze island soil after breeding season is complete. Health of remaining island trees will be determined using International Society of Arboriculture assessment procedures.

HALEY L. KENYON

Post-doctoral associate in Ecology
& Evolutionary Biology
University of Colorado Boulder
\$1,950

THE EFFECTS OF COLOR PATTERN DIFFERENCES ON BETWEEN-SPECIES AGGRESSIVE INTERACTIONS IN A COLORADO FRONT RANGE AVIAN HYBRID ZONE

(with co-investigator **Scott A. Taylor**)



Haley Kenyon

Color patterns, vocalizations and other species-recognition cues mediate interaction among animals of the same and different species that inhabit the same area. Among birds that share habitat, color patterns diverge more

between species, but the effect of this difference on relations between them is poorly understood. Kenyon's work aims to compare and contrast such behavior among Black-capped and Mountain chickadees that coexist (and occasionally interbreed) along a 4,000-foot elevation gradient from Boulder up to CU Boulder's Mountain Research Station near Ward.

Black-capped Chickadee (*Poecile atricapillus*) and Mountain Chickadee (*Poecile gambeli*) have "striking color pattern differences," Kenyon said in her grant proposal for a project meant to understand if different color patterns affect aggressive interaction. "I will integrate results from robust field experiments, population surveys, and cutting-edge genomic analyses from Colorado Front Range populations." One experiment exposes 3D-printed models of both species to individual birds in the hybrid zone to see if the differences "influence species recognition in aggressive interactions, which have important implications" for acquiring mates and claiming resources (food, territory, nesting cavities).

The project also aims to understand better the effect that the presence of humans has on birds locally. Chickadee hybridization is thought to be enabled by more contact between the two species because of increased urbanization.



Black-capped Chickadee
Patrick O'Driscoll



LAST WORD, LAST LOOK

**Fall migration: “The world moves . . .
and we long to move with it”**

Least Sandpipers
Jim Esten

Patrick O'Driscoll

As their autumn exodus deepens, we present a Colorado gallery of birds on the move or about to depart. Our summer nesters and seasonal residents — as well as out-of-town passers-through who hatched and fledged their young elsewhere — are migrating south before winter descends.

“That such delicate creatures undertake these epic journeys defies belief,” Pulitzer Prize finalist **Scott Weidensaul** writes in *[Living on the Wind](#)*, a rich study of bird migration in the Americas. The migratory hawks, shorebirds, waders, flycatchers, warblers and so many others who have delighted us here since last spring are among an estimated 5 billion-with-a-B birds that undertake semiannual passages across hundreds and thousands of miles of the Western Hemisphere.



Swainson's Hawk juvenile at
Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR
Jim Esten



Pelicans at Cherry Creek SP
Rob Raker

Continued on page 26



Blue Grosbeak at Lagerman Reservoir
John Salisbury



Wilson's Warbler in autumn
rabbitbrush, Chatfield SP
Jim Esten



Bullock's Oriole near Lyons, CO
J. Maxwell Images of Nature

At the same time, we're about to welcome our own over-winter guests. For some flocks of geese, ducks and others from farther north or higher up, Front Range winters are balmy by comparison. "Bird migration," Weidensaul adds, "is the one truly unifying natural phenomenon in the world, stitching the continents together."

Swainson's Hawks that fledged young in Colorado this summer are kettling up for a 6,000-mile mass migration to wintering grounds in Argentina. Wilson's Warblers, seldom seen here during their springtime push north, are somehow more abundant now. One of their return flyways south for winter in Mexico and Central America runs right through Colorado.

On some level, how many of us wish we had wings with which to join them?

"Migrations speak to us, not just as observers of nature but as integral parts of it," writes **Mike Bergin**, creator of the [10,000 Birds](#) birding website and blog, "The world moves and, deep inside, we long to move with it."

For now, we silently sing: "So long, farewell, *auf wiedersehen*, goodbye" . . . but in anticipation, we add: "See you next spring."



Greater Yellowlegs in pond,
Archdiocese of Denver grounds
Jim Esten

Continued on page 27



Counter-clockwise
Sandhill Cranes (Jim Esten)
Marbled Godwit, Chatfield Reservoir (Jim Esten)
Baird's Sandpiper at Laggerman Reservoir, Boulder County (John Salisbury)
Solitary Sandpiper, Laggerman Reservoir (J.Maxwell Images of Nature)





Fall migrant Wilson's Warbler
taking flight, Chatfield SP
Jim Esten

*Until the next
Lark Bunting . . .*
**GOOD FALL
MIGRATION
BIRDING!**



THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 59 | ISSUE 11 | NOVEMBER 2023

DFOBIRDS.ORG

PTARMIGAN AWARD

Our Iowa-based web wizard
wins DFO's highest honor

PAGE 7

IN THE SCOPE

TN's her home, but CO
birds are in her heart

PAGE 20

LAST WORD, LAST LOOK

Great Horned Owl nests
in Bear Creek aviplex

PAGE 27

FIELD TRIPS IN FOCUS

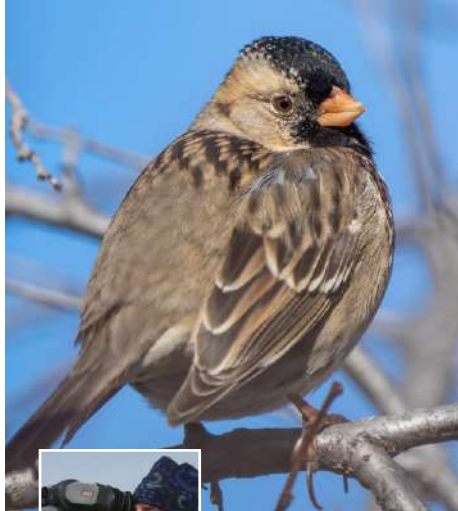
Say "Cheese!" on the
field trip trail, DFO'ers!

PAGE 16

dfo
DENVER FIELD
ORNITHOLOGISTS



Harris's Sparrow
Bear Creek Greenbelt, Lakewood
Rob Raker



ON THE COVER

Harris's Sparrow: Not from around here, but a welcome guest whenever it shows



Robert Raker, a DFO member since 2014, is a former environmental scientist, adventurer and filmmaker on many expeditions around the world. Now retired, he enjoys birding and photography and still goes rock-climbing and skiing.

As we near November, it's time to start watching for winter rarities — those unexpected birds that drift beyond their cold season haunts and land in our midst, sometimes even to hang out until spring. One to keep in mind is Harris's Sparrow (*Zonotrichia querula*), a ground-dwelling seedeater with a striking black crown, pink bill and spotted breast.

Large as sparrows go, Harris's breeds in northern Canada and winters on the southern Plains. But on the Cornell Lab's [Birds of the World distribution map](#), it barely rates slivers of migration-yellow and winter-blue along the eastern edge

of Colorado. Yet every year, a few find their way west to Front Range parks, brushy fields and greenbelts (regular DFO contributor **Rob Raker** found this month's cover bird in the Bear Creek Greenbelt in March 2021), and even urban and suburban backyards.

I know a bit about this. Four years ago, a first-winter Harris's showed up in my backyard on Nov. 24, two days before Thanksgiving. Unbelievably, it stuck around for five months — the rest of autumn, all winter and the first month of spring — in and around my east-central Denver yard, just two doors down from busy East Colfax Avenue. Readers of eBird's "Colorado Rare Bird Alert" must have grown weary of my every-other-day postings of the bird. But the thrill of its star presence made for a most memorable winter of 2020-21.

I checklist it on eBird 79 times over 18 weeks — an average of more than 4 sightings a week. I kept reporting it because, well, I was shocked it was still there! What a treat it was to watch it morph by late April from the tan cheeks, white throat and darkly stippled cap of an immature bird to the gray cheeks, black throat and blackening hood of an almost-adult.

It got along fine in the cover of backyard lilac bushes where I tossed out birdseed for my ground-feeding winter regulars: A dozen or two Dark-eyed Juncos, small flocks of House Sparrows and House Finches, and one or two White-crowned Sparrows, close cousins to Harris's with similar wing bars, tails and back patterns.

During a five-day lull in sightings in mid-February, a Harris's was reported at Denver City Park, my patch just a mile or so away. Oh no! Had "my" bird flown? But after seeing it at first light one morning and the Harris's in the park just an hour and a half later, I knew it hadn't left. Two more months later, April 29, was my last look.

Each November since, I start watching. Do you? Those winter visitors, they'll be out there — just you watch.

— **Patrick O'Driscoll**, editor



Harris's in Patrick's yard, 2020



IN THIS ISSUE

- 2 On the Cover**
Harris's Sparrow: Not from around here, but a welcome guest whenever it shows
- 5 From the President**
As seasons change, looking back and ahead: Time to trade the lawn for bird-friendlier habitat?
- 7 Ptarmigan Award**
Ann Johnson, DFO's longtime website wizard, receives club's highest honor
- 9 DFO News Notes**
- 16 Field Trips in Focus**
In Focus: Birders on the September trail
- 20 In the Scope**
Up close with new member Kelly Ducham
- 24 Conservation**
Chico Basin's bird-friendly ranchers aren't land board staff choice for new leaser
- 27 Last Word, Last Look**
Great Horned Owl nests of Bear Creek

The Lark Bunting newsletter of Denver Field Ornithologists is published online monthly at dfobirds.org except for joint issues in July–August and February–March.

PUBLICATION STAFF

Editor

Patrick O'Driscoll

Assistant Editor

Mike Fernandez

Photo Editor

Jim Esten

Layout and Design

Jennie Dillon

Contributors this issue

Liza Antony, Abby Burk, Anne Craig, Joe Chen, Kelly Ducham, Jim Esten, Mike Fernandez, Paul Hertz, Linda Hodges, Sandra Hoyle, Ann Johnson, Rosanne Juergens, Debby Miller, Rob Raker, Courtney Rella, Matt Rodgers, John Salisbury, Michelle Seubert, Bob Santangelo, David Suddjian, Sharon Tinianow

CONTRIBUTE TO THE NEWSLETTER

Submit original articles or story ideas to the editor at patodrisk@gmail.com.

Send image-file photos of birds or bird outings to the photo editor at jcesten@gmail.com.

Editors reserve the right to accept and edit suitable articles and photos for publication.

NEWSLETTER ADVERTISING

The Lark Bunting does not accept or contain paid advertising. DFO **AdBIRDtisements** are FREE to club members to seek or sell bird-related equipment, supplies, books and decorative items (artwork, photos, clothing, note cards, etc.).

- Ads must include name, email and/or telephone number, and may include weblink if items offered online
- Ads may be edited for inappropriate content or excessive length (125-word limit); ONE photo or image per ad
- Ads do not carry over each month. To renew, resubmit by next deadline
- Available *only* to DFO members
- Deadline: last day of month except January and June (*The Lark Bunting* does not publish in February and July)

Send AdBIRDtisement materials to editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com.

Next deadline: Tuesday, October 31



© 2023 Denver Field Ornithologists. All rights reserved



A community of birders, learning and acting together for avian wildlife

Denver Field Ornithologists is an all-volunteer organization that conducts hundreds of free birdwatching field trips throughout the year and welcomes participation and membership by all. DFO promotes enjoyment of nature, the study of birds, and protection of them and their habitats in greater Denver and beyond.

In addition to field trips, evening programs and birding workshops, DFO conducts community science in the field, including the spring Hawk Watch raptor migration count on Dinosaur Ridge.

DFO awards grants annually for bird-related research, education and conservation projects in Colorado. For more information, visit the [Research, Education & Conservation Grants](#) page on the DFO website.

DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and financial contributions to DFO's three giving funds are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

DFO OFFICERS

President

Sharon Tinianow
sharontinianow@gmail.com

Vice President

Matt Rodgers (Interim)
mattrodgers79@gmail.com

Secretary

Nathan Bond
dfobirds.secretary@gmail.com

Treasurer

Kathy Holland
kcloudview@comcast.net

Past President

Susan Blansett
susan.blansett@gmail.com

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Karen Drozda
drozforte@aol.com

Mary Geder
mfg5000@live.com

Cyndy Johnson
cyndyjohnson28@msn.com

Tina Jones
tjcalliope@hotmail.com

Roger Koester
koester1949@gmail.com

Patrick O'Driscoll
patodrisk@gmail.com

Janet Peters
j.f.peters58@gmail.com

Courtney Rella
dr.cawtney@gmail.com

David Suddjian
dsuddjian@gmail.com

Bill Turner
toursbyturner@aol.com

Elaine Wagner
ewagner1000@yahoo.com

COMMITTEE CHAIRS & ROLES

Better Birding Skills

Sharon Tinianow (acting)
sharontinianow@gmail.com

Communications & Outreach

Michael Fernandez (acting)
mikefernandez@icloud.com

Conservation

Courtney Rella
dr.cawtney@gmail.com

Field Trips

David Suddjian
davidsuddjian@gmail.com

Finance

Roger Koester
koester1949@gmail.com

Grants

Jill Boice
jill@booksandcats.net

Hawk Watch

Janet Peters
j.f.peters58@gmail.com

Membership

Cyndy Johnson
cyndyjohnson28@msn.com

Nominations

Mary Geder
mfg5000@live.com

Programs Director

Bill Turner
toursbyturner@aol.com

Historian

Kristine Haglund
kahaglund1@aol.com

Web Administrator

Jim Esten
admin@dfobirds.org

Zoom Coordinator

Jim Esten
admin@dfobirds.org

DFO ONLINE

Website

dfobirds.org

Facebook Group

facebook.com/groups/dfobirds

Instagram

instagram.com/denverfieldornithologists

CONTACT

Email

dfocommsgroup@gmail.com

Via website (at bottom of home page)

dfobirds.org

US Mail

Attn: Kathy Holland, Treasurer, DFO
351 E Caley Ave, Centennial, CO 80121-2201

LEARN MORE

Membership — Join or Renew

dfobirds.org/DFO/Membership.aspx

Field Trips — Explore / Sign Up

dfobirds.org/FieldTrips.aspx

Volunteering

dfobirds.org/DFO/Volunteer.aspx

Charitable Giving

dfobirds.org/DFO/Donations.aspx

DFO Merch Store

zazzle.com/store/official_dfo_shop



FROM THE PRESIDENT

As seasons change, looking back and ahead: Time to trade the lawn for bird-friendlier habitat?

Greetings, DFO members and guests! As we leave summer for another incomparable Colorado autumn, I'm reflecting on the past 12 months. I recall a rough winter, followed by all that rain and cooler temperatures in spring and early summer, and then drought and heat. Our usual weather pattern was really turned around In 2023, wasn't it?

We saw (and heard about) unusual birds, too. I sure enjoyed that winter-into-spring irruption of Bohemian Waxwings up and down the Front Range. And how about Colorado's first Limpkin (or was it two?) and a parade of other rarities? I don't know what part weather had in all that, but a recent article in The New York Times about North American species showing up in Britain because of Hurricane Lee was a surprise. What next? Might we really see Flamingos in Colorado?

Reflecting on the past year leads to anticipating the year to come. Will fall and winter weather hold new surprises, and will that affect what birds we see in the coming months? Anticipation of what's ahead keeps birders going out into the field as days shorten and temperatures drop.

Summer also brought a critical topic to our back door: habitat destruction. Shoreline vegetation removal at Barr Lake, planned multistory housing next to Belmar Park in Lakewood, and wholesale clearing of creekside trees and vegetation from First Creek birding hotspots in Denver's Green Valley Ranch area represent local development that can reduce or destroy bird habitat on the Front Range. No doubt there are more examples. How best to respond to such challenges is something the DFO Conservation Committee wrestles with constantly.

It's not all habitat gloom. I've been encouraged by the rising number of articles and social media posts about how to transform your yard from the standard monoculture of alien turf grass to a more native landscape friendly to birds and other pollinators. Now is the time to think about converting, and there's free information online to get you started. For openers, here are three good sources:

- [Denver Water](#)
- [Audubon of the Rockies](#)
- [Front Range Wild Ones](#)

A friend recently gave me a Wall Street Journal article that featured a converted yard in my own Denver neighborhood. Although it billed "rewilding your yard" as the latest luxury for homeowners — "luxury"



Native wildflower profusion
Patrick O'Driscoll

Continued on page 6



American Goldfinch in native plant garden
Patrick O'Driscoll



Bees go for native Rocky Mountain Beeplant
Patrick O'Driscoll

FROM THE PRESIDENT *cont from page 5*

because of the substantial cost for hired labor and “hardscape” materials like decorative rock and gravel mulch — the transition needn’t be expensive. Whether you’re a do-it-yourselfer or not, choosing native plants carries cost savings, from far less water use to eliminating the need for paid lawn care. And for birders who do this for the birds, it’s no extravagance. Imagine the renewed habitat we could create for birds and other urban and suburban wildlife if more homeowners, landlords and other property owners embraced the idea.

I am involved in a similar transition at my synagogue. Our sustainable landscaping task force spent far less than one of those luxury yard makeovers by recruiting volunteers to cover the existing turf with cardboard, spread mulch, and install native plants. We also shared natives from our own gardens, reducing the amount spent on nursery plants. We held a big planting day this past Labor Day and are confident our efforts will be rewarded next spring.

Another way to soften wildscaping costs is to spread out your project over several years. I transformed my own yard to a bird-friendly, pollinator-attracting landscape one step at a time. The key was to develop an overall plan, focus on one area each year, and re-assess continually what works and what doesn’t.

Each fall, I look back at the growing season, then make fresh plans for next spring. What plant will I move to a sunnier spot? Which plants’ seeds can I harvest and start indoors over the winter? Can I direct more rainwater and snowmelt into planted areas? Chatting with friends who garden often leads to swapping plants as we thin out overgrown patches in our yards.

The same pattern of reflection on the past and anticipation of the future that so enlivens birding can do the same when we birders decide to transform our conventional yards into bird-friendly landscapes. Now IS the time to start! Assess your yard, visit a website or three, read a book on rewilding your garden, and begin your plan for the spring. The birds you love will thank you.

Happy birding, everyone!

*DFO President **Sharon Tinianow**, who joined the club in 2016, was previously vice president (2021-23) and is a former editor of The Lark Bunting. She began birding in an ornithology class in college, and she retired as assistant director of CU Boulder’s Museum of Natural History.*

Ann Johnson, DFO's longtime website wizard, receives club's highest honor

Patrick O'Driscoll

Ann Johnson, Denver Field Ornithologists' indefatigable website designer, administrator and online troubleshooter for the past decade, is the newest recipient of the [Ptarmigan Award](#), DFO's highest honor for extraordinary service to the club.

Johnson, who provides web consulting and technical services to DFO and numerous other bird-related organizations remotely from her native Iowa, is the 27th Ptarmigan Award recipient and first in 5 years. One of the two most recent recipients in 2018 was her friend **Kay Niyo**, a former Iowan and ex-DFO board member instrumental in bringing Ann into the club's orbit — or, rather, bringing DFO into Ann's. In collaboration with Niyo and others, she helped develop [dfobirds.org](#) into a premier interactive website.

Johnson was honored in a surprise ceremony on Sept. 23 at the fall meeting of the Iowa Ornithologists' Union (IOU). **Susan Blansett**, DFO past president, "attended" onscreen via the internet to present the award remotely from Colorado, with an in-person assist from **Doug Harr**, president of Iowa Audubon. The award itself is a framed original painting of ptarmigans by DFO member and artist **Joe Chen**, noted for painting birds he sees on DFO field trips and posting them the same day on the DFO Facebook Group page.

Blansett praised Ann for her "incredible responsiveness," ready to troubleshoot DFO web problems at almost any hour "with a can-do attitude . . . What Ann has done for us goes way beyond what we pay her to do . . . (she) has enabled the growth of DFO, especially in the sophistication of our public-facing online presence."

In a thank-you message later to the DFO Board, Johnson said she was "honored and humbled" — and caught off guard. "You guys pulled off the best surprise of my life and as my British friends would say, I was totally gobsmacked," she said. "To have an original piece of Joe's artwork was the crowning touch."

Johnson then returned compliments to DFO: "It has been great fun to watch DFO's evolution over the past 10 years. You have no idea how often I use DFO as a model for how to provide engagement activities to get people involved in bird conservation. This is . . . something I hope we can replicate here in Iowa. I look forward to the next few years to see where things progress."

A lifelong Iowan except for three childhood years in Massachusetts when her father was in graduate school, Johnson was born **Ann Moore** in Indianola in July 1949. Her parents attended Simpson College there. She graduated there, too, and has remained in the area to this day, living more than 40 years in a country home north of town. "Although it's not an official eBird hotspot, many Iowa birders would call it such," Johnson says, "since they recorded their lifer Hoary Redpoll or Black-headed Grosbeak at my feeders."



Ann Johnson receiving Ptarmigan Award from Iowa Audubon's Doug Harr with DFO's Susan Blansett remote via Zoom
Paul Hertzell

Continued on page 8

Her career began in child welfare, but it “kind of morphed as the Internet came into existence,” she says. A largely self-taught programmer, she became a bridge in the 1990s between social workers’ needs and info technology. Her first non-career coding job was to develop the Iowa Ornithological Union’s website in 1996. Her reputation spread, and the web-design hobbyist was soon in demand in Iowa, Missouri and Nebraska. When an early-retirement buyout offer arose in 2010, the hobby became her new niche.

Not coincidentally, that’s when Johnson took on her first Colorado clients. Niyo, a former editor of *Iowa Bird Life*, reached out from Colorado to her friend. The gig to upgrade DFO’s website was struck in late 2013 when Niyo introduced her to the DFO Board. The assignment: Upgrade the website’s look and functionality, but also automate membership management and field trip signups. Until then, membership was a spreadsheet and index cards maintained by Membership chair **Mary Cay Burger**, and field trips were posted in the printed *Lark Bunting* newsletter with trip leader phone listings to call to sign up.

Work began in late spring 2014, and by August, DFO launched its new website. The changes were rapid and lasting. Membership is almost double today what it was in 2013. And the club’s flagship activity, free field trips, has exploded. Johnson acknowledges this is not through technology alone, “but consider this: In 2015, the first full year of web registrations, there were 124 field trips with 1,078 participants (346 individuals). In 2022, there were 279 trips and 2,279 participants (502 individuals).”

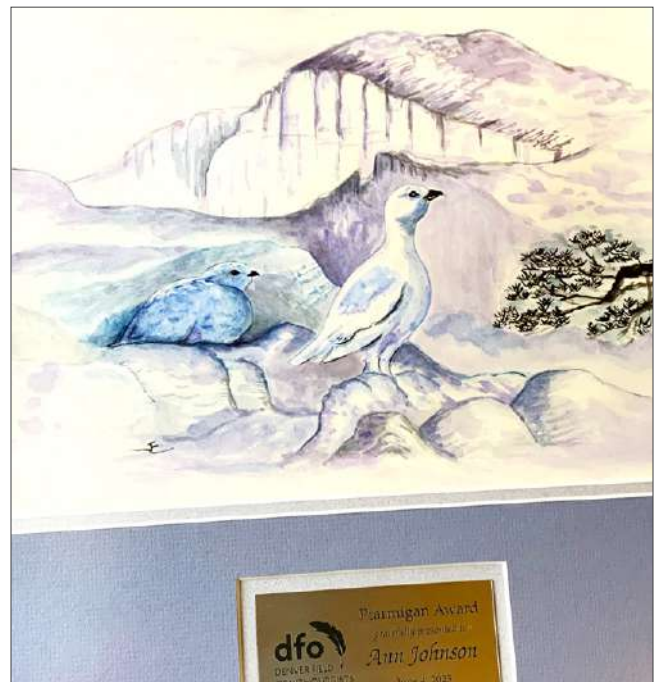
Today, Johnson’s [AJEndeavors](#) web development company advises DFO, Colorado Field Ornithologists and more than 30 clients in birds and birding, other wildlife, and nature filmmaking in about a dozen states. But Coloradans who know of Johnson only as a web guru may be surprised to learn of her accomplishments in Iowa birding circles.

“I don’t remember ever not being involved in birding,” Johnson told *Iowa Bird Life*, quarterly journal of the Iowa Ornithological Union, in a 2000 profile interview. At age 7 she was already keeping checklists. First species on her list? A Pileated Woodpecker, spotted on her grandmother’s corn crib in Wisconsin. (Young Ann thought it was a parrot.) Her uncle, a former president of the IOU, took her to her first meeting in 1961. She joined that year as a student member (\$1 a year) and has been a member ever since.

By the time she finished high school, she had birded some of the hottest hotspots in the US, from California to Arizona to Florida. During college in the late 1960s and early ’70s, she conducted breeding bird surveys. In 1970, she married **Paul Johnson**. Atop college and parenthood (son **Kurt**), she found time in the ’70s to become a bird bander, and through the 1990s, she served as an officer and board member of IOU.

The vanity license plate on her car, EMPID, reflects a bit of Johnson’s birding prowess in the early 1990s, when she recorded two Iowa firsts for a notoriously difficult genus. During the 1991 Christmas Bird Count, she ID’d a first winter record *Empidonax* sighting (a Least Flycatcher). The next year, she found Iowa’s first state record of a Western Flycatcher.

Asked about her own birding-related travels and adventures, Johnson replied, “Some adventures are best left shared in person rather than print!” But she went on to recall one extraordinarily frugal trip — “how four people birded (southeast) Arizona for 10 days for about \$120 each (we ate a lot of Gorp).” Or another time farther south: “How to end six weeks in Mexico with a broken leg and get carried onto the plane to get back to Phoenix, not to mention finding a place to buy crutches.” She also recalled, apparently from the same trip, that one “night of mescal, an unlocked motel room, and body exposure will go untold in print. The proprietor thought I was ‘muerto.’”



Award features framed ptarmigan painting by DFO member-artist Joe Chen

DFO News Notes

Patrick O'Driscoll

*Got blurbs on birds? Share with **DFO News Notes**: Colorado birding newsbits, eBird milestones, tales from the trail, birding life (and life birds!), etc. Email your items, photos, links and anything else to patodrisk@gmail.com.*

HELP SPREAD DFO'S WORD TO THE BIRDING-CURIOUS — VOLUNTEER!

To reach new audiences of birding enthusiasts as well as people who are just getting started birding, Denver Field Ornithologists was at two recent events. The first was the Barr Lake Birding Festival in early September, followed by Refuge Days at the Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR. Both are birding hotspots where DFO frequently leads field trips. Looking ahead to 2024, DFO needs volunteers to help us have a presence at more of these events. If you enjoy meeting new people, teaching kids how to use binoculars and identify birds, and talking to others about what DFO has to offer, we'd love to hear from you. Come, help us! To learn more and to volunteer, contact DFO President **Sharon Tinianow** at sharontinianow@gmail.com.



Conservation chair Courtney Rella, left, and DFO President Sharon Tinianow spreading the word at Refuge Days
Michelle Seubert

"COLORADO SEA DUCKS" IS OCT. 19 BIRD BOMBS SESSION

Colorado may be about 1,000 miles from the nearest ocean or gulf, but fall is the time to spot ocean-going ducks here — three species of scoters. Join us on **Oct. 19 at 7 p.m. MDT** for "**Colorado Sea Ducks**," the next "BIRD BOMBS" mini-webinar of bird ID and tips. [Click here to register](#). Although common along US coastlines, the Surf, Black and White-winged scoters are uncommon visitors here, and they're often challenging to identify. In this half-hour (plus Q&A) session we will turn the glass out to sea to help you see and identify these wonderful ducks, as well as Long-tailed Duck, their close relative. Other "ocean birds" show up along the Front Range in autumn, too: loons, jaegers, Red Phalarope and more. Visit the [DFO BIRD BOMBS video archive](#) to view past episodes helpful for the fall season, and all seasons. These free webinars provide helpful bursts of ID info. Watch live and review the videos at your convenience.



DFO RAISES DUES SLIGHTLY, FIRST BUMP SINCE 2015

For the first time in eight years, Denver Field Ornithologists is raising the cost of membership. Out of fairness, the DFO Board voted unanimously to create separate individual and family dues for the first time. The price hikes from the previous \$25 dues are modest. Individual adults — the majority of the club's membership — will now pay \$30 a year. Couples or those wishing to include all in the household as members will pay a "family" rate of \$45, or the cost of an individual plus \$15. Separately, DFO "student" memberships (through age 22), last raised from \$5 to \$10 in 2016, will go to \$15.

The increases will help DFO meet rising costs for programs, community science projects including the spring Hawk Watch

Continued on page 10

count, production of *The Lark Bunting* newsletter, other communications and outreach, and other club operating expenses.

As a practical matter, paid dues in DFO makes it, in essence, a “donor society” whose members contribute to the life and goals of a club whose principal activities (field trips and programs) are largely or completely free of charge to all. “Membership means everything to DFO’s success,” says President **Sharon Tinianow**, “from volunteer work leading field trips and operating our club to financial support through dues and grant donations to assist bird-related research, education and conservation. Without our members, DFO simply couldn’t exist. They — *you* — are invaluable.”

Dues have risen and even fallen from time to time over the past 55-plus years. The first mention of dues in this newsletter was in March 1967, when membership was \$3 a year. Two years later it rose to \$4, and in 1974, DFO first described “family regular” membership for individuals or families (still at \$4) and added a “student” category (age 18 and under) at \$2 a year. By 1981, dues were \$10 family/individual and \$5 student, plus a \$5 “senior citizen” rate (65 and older). Sixteen years later, 1997, DFO dropped the senior category and individual/family membership was \$25 a year.

In 2001, regular membership dropped to \$20 a year. With the move to an electronic, non-printed newsletter, it remained there until rising to \$25 in 2015. Meanwhile, dues for members who still preferred the costlier printed, mailed newsletter crept up from \$25 to \$60 a year until DFO ceased *The Lark Bunting*’s dwindled print run (only 12 copies a month) at the end of last year.

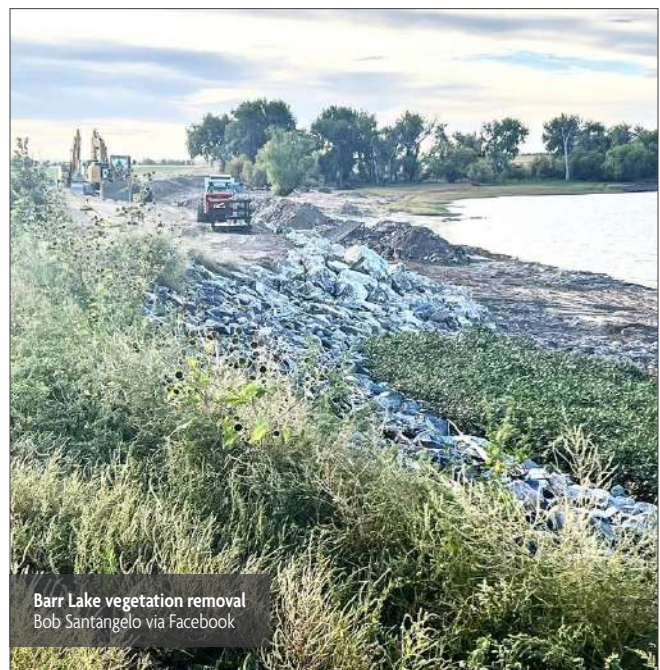
BARR LAKE VEGETATION BULLDOZING UPROAR: AN UPDATE

A reservoir enlargement project at Barr Lake SP in Adams County by the lake’s owners caught birders and other parkgoers by surprise in September. Outraged eyewitnesses and local news reports showed grisly images of chopped-down cottonwoods and a bulldozed stretch of dike and shoreline habitat in the lake’s northeast corner. Furious discussion and debate followed on the CoBirds birder list-serv and social media. Critics of the project by the 120-year-old Farmers Reservoir and Irrigation Co. (FRICO) complained that

a \$184,000 grant from the Colorado Water Conservation Board for some of the company’s work might end up supporting water supplies for controversial fracking operations by oil and gas producers in the area.

Colorado Parks & Wildlife had little say in the matter, but contrary to common belief, the park is merely a recreational tenant on the lake, which FRICO owns. The work begins a 5-year project that could remove at least some vegetation along more than 4 miles of the lakefront. More than a mile of shoreline trail now is closed for work. A sensitive Bald Eagle nesting area at the opposite end of the lake is said not to be threatened, for now at least.

Somewhat in the middle is the Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, which operates the spring and fall migration bird-banding station at Barr Lake and is headquarters in the historic Old Stone House behind the dam on the reservoir’s north shore. In a statement on Sept. 22, the conservancy said it is “committed to work with FRICO and Colorado Parks & Wildlife to mitigate as much habitat loss as possible . . . We are optimistic that we were heard and FRICO is committed to minimizing the damage and protecting as much habitat as possible” while reinforcing the dikes for safety. The conservancy thanked “the bird and conservation community and our partners,” including DFO, for “raising their voices and providing awareness for this critical place for birds.”



Barr Lake vegetation removal
Bob Santangelo via Facebook

Continued on page 11

Reassurances have not muted outrage that such destruction could occur at such a popular state recreation site and major preserve for birds with little or no public warning. “Humans and their lifestyle is what this water is being managed for. Agriculture, oil and gas, industry and municipal use . . . are the heavy hitters that drive our economy and our lives,” **Michael Tincher**, a wildlife rehabilitator and researcher from Loveland, wrote in a post on the CoBirds birding list-serv. “Wildlife does benefit from this water, but takes a backseat when infrastructure needs repair, upgrades and expansion. The challenge for most of us . . . is that we usually don’t find out until the 11th hour.”

For further background, read local news coverage, including this [Oct. 4 update](#) from *The Colorado Sun* online news service, and this [Sept. 23 front-page report](#) by *The Denver Post*.

SEWER WORK TO CLOSE POPULAR BOULDER BIRDING SPOTS

Amidst controversies over damage to bird habitat, the reality of infrastructure maintenance will affect two of Boulder’s more popular birding hotspots from now through 2025. The City of Boulder’s utilities department is rehabbing and replacing portions of the city’s sanitary sewer system in and around the Sawhill Pond and Walden Ponds areas. Construction will necessitate seasonal trail closures at both locations. More specific details about the work are at Boulder’s Projects webpages at this link: <https://boulder.colorado.gov/projects/main-sewer-improvements-project>. In a note to Boulder’s birding and naturalist community, **Scott Severs** of Boulder County Audubon said the project “is being monitored by state, federal and local agencies to prevent impacts to nesting species.”

DFO’S SEPTEMBER BIRDING: 24 FIELD TRIPS IN 20 DAYS

As has been DFO’s custom, the club led a lot of field trips in September. The two-dozen outings fell on 20 of September’s 30 days. DFO Field Trip chair **David Suddjian** reports that, added to the rest of 2023 so far, the running total of outings is 227 this year, “with a trip happening on 67 percent of all days.” Busy birders saw 188 species and submitted 146 eBird checklists for those trips. For an eBird trip report that summarizes all of DFO’s September activity, [click on this link](#). One of the highlights was our sixth field trip visit to Aurora’s new and restricted-access Ponderosa Preserve. DFO is helping to document the preserve’s birds on these trips. Another DFO outing to Ponderosa is planned in late October. Details for that field trip and many others are on the DFO website’s “Upcoming Trips” page, [at this link](#).

“THE BEAUTY IN ROADKILL” EXALTS BIRDS, OTHER ROADSIDE VICTIMS

The Last Word on Nothing, a blog of uncommonly non-science-y science writing, recently carried a short photo essay about . . . roadkill? “[Finding the Beauty in Roadkill](#)” contains tasteful, artfully decorated portraits of wild creatures that met their end from vehicles speeding down the asphalt. No gore, just strange still images from the camera of a Texas environmental anthropologist who seeks “to make us see the wild deaths humans both inflict and ignore.” Her subjects include a Northern Cardinal, described as one of “as many as 340 million (birds) killed by vehicles in the United States every year.” [Click here](#) to view this unusual blogpost.





Abby Burk

FALL PROGRAM PREVIEW

Water Flows Together: Opportunities for Birds and People in 2023

Abby Burk

Monday, October 23

7 p.m. MST via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)



Tree planting restoration work along Dolores River
Abby Burk

Water connects us all, humans and birds alike. Clean and reliable water supplies and healthy, flowing rivers are essential both to people's ways of life in Colorado and to the 400-plus species of birds that spend some or all of the year within its borders.

But with rivers so essential to Colorado's future, their stewardship falls to humankind alone. It touches all water uses, and users, including avian wildlife. All of us, whether birders or not, have roles in sustaining this water future for all life.

Against that sobering backdrop, join **Abby Burk** of Audubon Rockies for an engaging October evening program about our state's freshwater ecosystems, current issues involving Colorado water, and what it all means for birds and people. Burk's Zoom presentation, "Water Flows Together: Opportunities for Birds and People in 2023," is set for **Monday, Oct. 23 at 7 p.m. MDT.**

Burk is senior manager of the Western Rivers program for Audubon Rockies, the Fort Collins-based regional office of National Audubon for Colorado, Wyoming and Utah. In this role, she says, she is "committed to advancing riparian habitat and stream resiliency through advocacy and action." She professes a lifetime of love for rivers, particularly the Colorado River and its tributaries.

Her talk comes in a pivotal year for water planning in Colorado. In January, the state water board released an updated [Colorado Water Plan](#) that highlights water conservation as a necessary starting point for meeting the state's water needs. During review of the draft plan in 2022, Burk and other advocates also pushed hard for making river health a priority. "Stream restoration clarity around water rights was front and center during the legislative session," Burk says. "We were on the front lines. But there's more work needed."

An expert in ecological management and "an award-winning educator and river corridor diplomat," Burk holds a bachelor's degree in biology and an interdisciplinary master's degree with concentrations in ecology and hydrology. She is an avid whitewater kayaker and enjoys time on western rivers as often as possible.

NOTE:

The program originally scheduled for Oct. 23, **Birding the Lower Rio Grande Valley: Top 5 Hotspots and More with Tamie Bulow**, has been postponed until January 2024.

Watch here for details later this fall.

FALL PROGRAM PREVIEW

Wildlife, Wetlands and the Everglades

Lauren Jonaitis and Stephanie Clements

Monday, November 27

7 p.m. MST via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)



These are perilous times for the Everglades. South Florida's birding-rich "River of Grass" seems in constant turmoil, whether it's a hidden legion of alien, wildlife-killing Burmese pythons run amok or the unending power struggle over the control and quality of water and the threat of encroaching development across the region.

On the Monday after Thanksgiving, DFO's final evening program of the autumn 2023 season will explore the rich history and science of this vast, iconic landscape with two Everglades advocates from the [Tropical Audubon Society](#) of Miami. "Wildlife, Wetlands and the Everglades" (**Nov. 27, 7 p.m. MST via Zoom**) will feature Tropical Audubon senior Conservation director **Lauren Jonaitis** and Education & Advocacy director **Stephanie Clements**.

"You will gain knowledge about the birds and other wildlife who depend on the Everglades habitats and discover why this ecosystem is so important ecologically, culturally and economically to Florida," said Jonaitis, who works on the "project delivery team" for several Everglades restoration projects. She joined Tropical

Audubon last year to focus on expanding and amplifying the organization's role and reach across South Florida. Previously, she worked for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to reduce artificial light pollution effects on sea turtles and their coastal nesting habitat.

Jonaitis also worked in private industry as an environmental/coastal scientist, focused on permitting and dune restoration and maintenance. Currently, she is vice president of Policy for the Society of Conservation Biology North America. She is also the society's Communications chair. She holds a bachelor's degree in zoology from State University of New York at Oswego and a master's in conservation and population biology from Bowling Green State University in OH.

Clements oversees Tropical Audubon's flagship Ambassador Program, which cultivates volunteer environmental advocates across Miami. She is now working to broaden its membership among underrepresented and excluded communities. She earned her doctorate in biology from the University of Miami, where her dissertation focused on conservation of reptiles and amphibians in human-modified landscapes of Miami and Costa Rica. In her doctoral work, Clements studied both native and non-native reptiles and amphibians in the Everglades and other prominent South Florida ecosystems. She worked previously as an interpretive ranger in the National Park Service, field manager for an environmental advocacy group, and as a children's educational instructor at a zoo.

CONSERVATION

Where are the birds this fall?

Editor's note: Longtime Colorado birder **Mary Kay Waddington** raised this question in September on the CoBirds list-serv. The Lark Bunting has adapted her original post here with additional notes from Mary Kay, who was featured in our [January 2022 newsletter](#) with stepmother and longtime DFO member **Jan Justice Waddington**. They are transcribing into eBird together the voluminous checklists of the late **Frank Justice**, a prominent 20th century Colorado birder.

Mary Kay Waddington

Is anyone else out there completely frightened by the lack of birds right now? I've always played a game with myself when I go out for my sunrise birding around the property — 2-1/2 acres in Englewood with cottonwoods, elms, thickets, a creek, and a large field. I don't allow myself to go back in until I've seen at least 10 species. And this includes in the dead of winter with snow on the ground.

Well, in the past few weeks I've been lucky to see five species each morning. So I checked the number of species I'd seen the past few Septembers up to this date (Sept. 23):

- 2020 — 63 species
- 2021 — 47 species
- 2022 — 53 species
- 2023 — 44 species

I've definitely been getting fewer species, but not conclusively. So I did a little more calculating, using my September bird lists for the past 4 years. I used only the first bird walk of the day — usually around sunrise or a bit later — and I only calculated from Sept. 1 to Sept. 23. I came up with these daily averages of total species and total individual birds:

- 2020 — 16 species, 63 individual birds
- 2021 — 14 species, 30 individuals
- 2022 — 11 species, 34 individuals
- 2023 — 8 species, 16 individuals

This frightens me. In 2019 we were told, in that [major study in the journal Science](#) about declines in breeding birds nationwide, that the US has lost 30 percent of its birds in the past 50 years. Have we reached a tipping point, with the number changing exponentially? In 10 years, will there be any birds left at all?

My findings are in no way scientific, but are perhaps they are enough to raise some concern. I believe someone needs to do some "real" science to see if this is in fact happening. If so, is it regional, or caused by weather and climate alterations in migration patterns, or lack of food? Is it the insects that are now in decline? What about pesticides? If it could be breeding-related, what do Breeding Bird Surveys tell us?

I've had more than half a dozen private responses to my September post on CoBirds, all saying basically that they are noticing a dramatic decline as well. (One response even came from England!) The single public reply on CoBirds nearly two weeks later suggested that perhaps northern forest fires in Canada this past summer had affected the number of birds migrating through Colorado this fall. Personally, I'm doubting the answer is as simple as those wildfires. Weren't most of them in the East anyway? And how would that account for the steady four-year decline?

I sincerely hope the good people at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, who have plentiful data at hand, are doing a lot of number crunching right now that's much more scientific than my quick little add-and-divide math. But I haven't heard or read a word from anyone yet about a decline. One more indicator: Look at the rather dismal bird banding records this fall.

I'll say it once more: Anyone out there seeing the same thing and having any ideas what's going on?



Colorado native **Mary Kay Waddington** birds several times a day around the Englewood home where she grew up. She first took up birding while a student at Oberlin College, where her roommate was a birder. She gives private lessons in the harp and is an author on the Suzuki Method in her instrument.

DFO: It's ALL of us

In full-page displays last fall (2022), we introduced you to three of your more than 675 fellow members of Denver Field Ornithologists. A year later, our membership message still rings true:

Whether we belong to DFO for its hundreds of FREE field trips (unparalleled *anywhere*) . . .

Or for monthly programs by exceptional speakers . . .

Or for the opportunity to sharpen your birding skills in workshops . . .

Or simply to share in appreciating and conserving birds and their habitats in Colorado . . .

Our strength is in belonging and in sharing — in our love for birds and their place among us . . . and ours among them

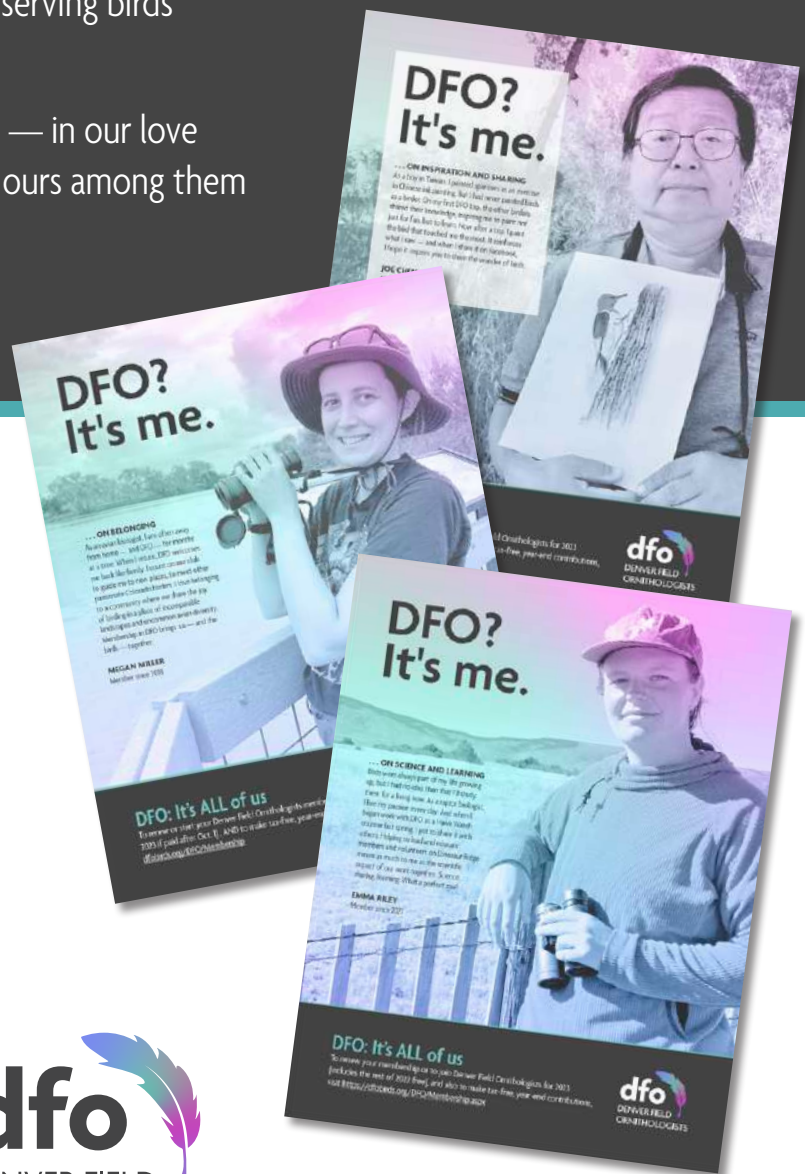
Help keep DFO strong and your connection to Colorado birds and birding vital

Join DFO or renew your membership now before year's end

And while you're there, consider a tax-free, year-end contribution to one of DFO's three giving funds

[CLICK HERE FOR DFO MEMBERSHIP PAGE](#)

dfo
DENVER FIELD
ORNITHOLOGISTS





FIELD TRIPS IN FOCUS

In Focus: Birders on the September trail

Here's our second installment of **Field Trips in Focus**, with DFO field trippers in September, doing what we do. Our goal: At least one photo in *The Lark Bunting* of people birding on every DFO field trip in a month. Seven glimpses this month is better than three in August, but c'mon, field trippers: SHOW US YOUR PIX!

It's EASY: Take a shot or two of your fellow birders on your next DFO outing — hiking the trail, stopping together to scope a choice bird, or just candid moments. Have fun with it!

This month, email us your **October field trip birder shots** — .JPG or .PNG photo files, in focus, uncropped and unedited, with date/location of your DFO trip and any individual IDs, if needed. Send to editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com and CC: to photo editor **Jim Esten** at jcesten@gmail.com. Deadline is the last day of the month, no later than **Tuesday, Oct. 31**. Again, photos of field trip people, not bird shots. Thanks!



SEPTEMBER 4 Mount Falcon Park

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Anne Craig, Joe Chen, Linda Purcell,
Michelle Trotter, Julia Auckland,
Dick Prickett, Margo Constable

Mt Falcon Park field trippers
at Eagle's Eye Shelter
(Joe Chen)

SEPTEMBER 9 Parker Regional Park

Leader

John Breitsch

Participants

Felice Lyons, John Williams,
Rosanne Juergens, Joe Chen,
Laurie Tripp, Mark Amershek,
Carol Besse, Nadiyah Watts,
Cat Phanthamany, Dallas Branum

John Breitsch, left, and Mark Amershek
bushwhack to an elusive bird
(Rosanne Juergens)



Continued on page 17

SEPTEMBER 10
**Rocky Mountain
Arsenal NWR**

Leader
John Breitsch

Participants
Anne Craig, Denise Reznicek,
Becky Russell, Steve Methven,
Sandra Hoyle, Winston Liu,
Timothy Condon, Jeff Dawson,
John Batt, David Suddjian,
Kathy Barnum, Taina Brin, Linda Purcell,
Bonnie Prado, Virginia Gulakowski

Almost all eyes focus southwest of
Rocky Mtn Arsenal visitor center
(Sandra Hoyle)



SEPTEMBER 17-19
**Southeastern
Colorado**

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Kenneth Stuckey, Lorraine Dixon-Jones,
Ann Christensen, Courtney Rella,
Jeff Dawson, Peggy Gonder,
Christopher Curwen, Linda Cunico

Insect casualties on lead car's grille
during buggy SE Colorado trip
(David Suddjian)

Continued on page 18

SEPTEMBER 21
Elbert County

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Deb Piranian, Shelley Conger,
Gary Witt, Liza Antony,
Kenneth Stuckey,
Deborah Hebblewhite,
Kent Bagley

**Back-road strategizing
on Elbert County trip**
(Liza Antony)



SEPTEMBER 24
**Reynolds Park,
Jefferson County
Open Space**

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Bonnie Prado, Dick Prickett,
Anne Craig, Robert Tonge,
Jennifer Tonge, Jeff Dawson,
John Batt

**Bonnie Prado and Robert Tonge
eye a Townsend's Solitaire on
Reynolds Park trip**
(David Suddjian)

Continued on page 19

SEPTEMBER 30

Ponderosa Preserve, Aurora (restricted access)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Cynthia Cestkowski, Debby Miller,
Bonnie Prado, Linda Purcell, Rae Jones,
Jennifer Randal, Winston Liu,
Susanna Donato, Nathan Crow

Looking in seven directions on
trip to Ponderosa Preserve
(Debby Miller)



Loggerhead Shrike at
Ramah State Wildlife Area
Patrick O'Driscoll

Welcome to new DFO members

Tristan and Kathy Barnes of Louisville; Michelle Clendenin, Brighton; Mary Dawes and Chip Dawes, Castle Rock; Caelin Jones, Liam Jones and Joel Jones, Lakewood; Catherine Lewis, Denver; Michael Fernandez, Denver

Thank you for your contribution

Friends of DFO
Karen Bauer





DFO PEOPLE

In the Scope: Up close with new member Kelly Ducham

Editor's note: **In the Scope** is an occasional Q&A featuring DFO people — those who lead your field trips, volunteer, or participate in the life of our club are welcome — email The Lark Bunting at patodrisk@gmail.com

Name: Kelly Ducham

Home city: Decatur, TN

Age: 59

Occupation: 6th grade science teacher (retired)

How I got into birding?

Growing up in Virginia, I was 8 years old when my family moved to Yorktown, in a wooded community with large lots and tons of green space. In the empty lot beside ours, Pileated Woodpeckers were nesting in a pine tree. I was so excited — not just to see such an amazing bird but also to watch a whole family in and around the nest cavity. That was definitely my “spark” bird. Not long after, I got binoculars and the first of many field guides.

When I was ready for college, I wanted to study marine biology. I chose to do so at the University of Miami in Florida, mostly so I could be near the Everglades for birding. After graduation in 1985, I stayed in Florida, moving to Naples on the southwest coast to work at a nature center before becoming a classroom teacher. For the next 41 years, south Florida was my home. I loved the marshy, swampy environment, especially places like [Big Cypress National Preserve](#) and [Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary](#) northeast of Naples. Although I always birded casually on vacation trips, family and teaching took so much time and energy that birding was not my everyday priority. But in 2017, with my two kids grown and mostly independent, I discovered eBird and began birding with gusto.

When and why I joined DFO?

After retiring from teaching in 2022 and moving to Tennessee with my husband, **Bob**, we found ourselves waiting for our new house to be completed. So we spent September through November staying with our Colorado son, **Brendon**, in Lakewood. It was then that I learned about Denver Field Ornithologists and its many field trips. With plans for a return visit this year in August, I joined this very active birding community and signed up for as many trips as I could. Although I bird solo comfortably, I didn't always want to be by myself, especially with so many more local parks and hotspots to learn about. Plus, I knew I could improve my birding



Kelly scoping birds on DFO
field trip to Eleven Mile Reservoir
David Suddjian

Continued on page 21

skills alongside others on DFO outings. So I went for it, joining nine different field trips between July 30 and Aug. 29. I also learned so much by watching the recorded “[BIRD BOMBS](#)” mini-webinars on the DFO website. I appreciate how the information is so pertinent to the area and the specific time of year.

Where I birded before coming to Colorado?

In Virginia, we lived near a marsh along the York River, so I really loved seeing herons and egrets. My dad enjoyed birding and encouraged my interest. A special place we often visited together in winter is [Back Bay NWR](#) in Virginia Beach. It’s a shoreline wetlands where thousands of Snow Geese, Tundra Swans and other geese and ducks visit in fall and winter. Now that we live in Tennessee (Decatur is midway between Knoxville and Chattanooga), I’m just an hour away from the mountains of Tennessee and North Carolina. While I miss birding in the south Florida wetlands, I do not miss the humidity or hurricanes at all.

First Colorado birding experience?

My first eBird list in Colorado was along County Road 40 in Bethune, about 20 miles from the Kansas border off I-70. I saw my first Horned Lark there — too cute! It was June 2021, and we were driving all the way from Florida to visit Brendon and his wife, **Kayla**. Birding highlights of our two-week Colorado stay were a visit to Alma south of Breckenridge (my first Red Crossbill and Pine Grosbeak!), and quite a bit of time at Cherry Creek SP. But we also went north to the Fort Collins area and visited Pawnee National Grasslands.

Favorite DFO trip so far?

I am not very good at choosing favorites, but I’ll say the Aug. 22 field trip to Reynolds Park in Jefferson County. I love a good hike in the woods with some elevation change and lovely views. On that trip we saw American Three-toed Woodpecker and Williamson’s Sapsucker, and not just fast-glance-and-there-it-goes views, either. We had a good amount of time to look at and appreciate them and their behavior — and of course, to get pictures!



Kelly Ducham, right, with son Brendon and husband Bob above Aspen

My approach / philosophy toward birding?

I try to study and research as much as possible ahead of time: field guides, birdsong and calls, eBird lists, etc. But on birding day, it’s time just to enjoy the birds and the environment I’m in. I like to take my time and soak up as much else as I can — native plants, other wildlife, the beauty of the place — and to stop and look around, not just rush through. I usually carry a camera and take sound recordings to analyze later at home. But really, I prefer just my binoculars. They’re the first and best way to appreciate the bird. Only after I “see” it do I think about pictures and audio.

Continued on page 22

Favorite place to bird in Colorado?

I haven't been to a single place yet that I haven't enjoyed, but one favorite is [Lair o' the Bear Park](#) in JeffCo. I usually make it the first and later the last park to visit on my trips to Colorado. After that short and lovely 20-minute drive up the canyon, I enjoy the walk along the creek or up on the bluff; I can do short and leisurely, or go the distance farther. There is a good mix of birds and I am always on the lookout for American Dipper, a favorite.

Someplace I'd like to bird where I never have?

I love birding anywhere. While visiting my daughter **Brittany** and her partner **Xander** in Pittsburgh recently, we walked and birded in Frick Park, a woodsy place right in town. But next April, I'll be in a more exotic destination: Belize, on my first international birding trip. Then in May, Bob and I will follow the spring migration of eastern warblers and so many others through Kentucky, Ohio and Michigan as they move north to breed. We'd love to find a Kirtland's Warbler and a Mourning Warbler along the way. A broader goal is to go birding in all 50 states and to visit as many units of the National Park System as I can. I am always scheming and dreaming about the next birding destination, and I love driving road trips!

A favorite story or anecdote about my birding?

Until this past spring, my decade-long nemesis bird was the Green Kingfisher. I had been many places in the West where it seemed everyone but me was seeing this bird! I love kingfishers, and green is my favorite color, so over the years the species just became more beautiful . . . and more elusive. Finally, on a trip to south Texas last April, I not only saw the Green Kingfisher but had enough time for good looks and pictures.

What's ahead for your Colorado birding?

I will be back! Hopefully, several times a year, and for weeks at a time. For 2024, I am thinking about a winter trip and then a late summer trip (August to mid-September). I will be watching the DFO website and calendar for field trips and will sign up for as many as I can. I'm so glad I joined DFO! This summer I learned not only about birds but also about plants and entire ecosystems. I enjoyed meeting other birders and found everyone friendly and helpful, as I am definitely still learning my western birds.



CONSERVATION

For birds' sake, it's time to get the lead out of all hunting ammo

Matt Rodgers

The federal ban in 1991 on the use of lead shot for waterfowl hunting was a response to decades (and really much longer) of mounting evidence that it was poisoning millions of these birds annually. The leading cause was direct swallowing of lead shot while feeding off the bottom of marshes and other bodies of water.

But more than 30 years since the lead ban for waterfowl hunting, lead remains legal in essentially all other forms of hunting and recreational shooting. Given that raptors routinely hunt and scavenge animals that have been wounded or killed with lead ammunition, the threat to them of lead poisoning remains constant.

The evidence remains compelling to me, as a birder and a hunter, that for the protection of both birds and the sport of hunting, hunters should not use lead bullets or shot in any hunting situations. The vast majority of Americans, about 80 percent, support hunting when done ethically. Abandoning lead shot (and replacing it with non-toxic alternatives like copper) is the ethical thing to do.

Although it took decades to finally pass the waterfowl lead-shot ban in the US, it is a key reason for the remarkable rebound in duck and goose populations by more than 50 percent since 1970. Credit also goes to hunter-funded conservation (the [Pittman-Robertson excise tax](#) and [Duck Stamps](#)), private conservation groups, hunting license sales and adaptive management of seasonal game harvests. This conservation success is all the more remarkable considering that nearly 3 billion birds have been lost across North America since 1970, according to the now-famous *Science* academic journal article in 2019. Growing waterfowl numbers, largely because of hunter-led efforts, were one of the few standout exceptions in that sobering call to action for avian conservation.

The banning of the agricultural insecticide DDT in 1972 was instrumental in reducing avifauna losses, especially among

raptors (200 percent population increase since that 1970 benchmark in the *Science* report). But lead poisoning remains a key cause of death among raptors worldwide. This includes eagles, hawks and owls and, especially, vultures. For the California Condor, the endangered vulture species and largest bird in North America, lead is by far their number one cause of death.

State agencies and sporting organizations have made encouraging efforts to move beyond lead ammo. The Arizona Game & Fish Department created a voluntary program to provide hunters free non-lead ammunition in big-game hunting season, and it promotes voluntary use of such ammo especially in areas like the Kaibab Plateau, where California Condors live and scavenge. Although voluntary, the program has resulted in upwards of 90 percent participation. In 2019, California went further, instituting a statewide ban on lead bullets and shot for any form of hunting.

Rather than call for statutory bans, organizations have formed to educate and promote voluntary use of lead-free ammo, including the North American Non-lead Partnership (<https://nonleadpartnership.org/home/en>) and Sporting Lead-Free (<https://www.sportingleadfree.org/>).

I like the idea of educating and promoting lead-free hunting in a grassroots manner, but it's not hard to imagine a nationwide ban on lead ammo that follows the [North American Model of Wildlife Conservation](#), which evolved in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in Canada and the United States and is based on regulated, science-based wildlife management.



Lead bullet fragments next to spent copper slug
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership

Continued on page 24



While some in the hunting community are always reluctant to try something new (as happened at first with the lead ammo ban for waterfowl hunting), I have switched to copper bullets myself for hunting big game like elk and deer. I find copper superior to its lead counterparts in many ways, including accuracy and penetration. It's all the more compelling to know that I am not leaving a potentially deadly situation for scavenging raptors if they find an animal wounded by a copper bullet.

And that adds to my own peace of mind, knowing I'm feeding my growing family with lean, mineral-rich, and lead-free wild game meat.

I'll continue to promote lead-free ammo wherever I go. I'll also ask you, the reader, no matter whether you hunt or not, to reflect on the profound good that regulated hunting has given back to wildlife conservation, including non-game species. Further, please consider respectfully engaging on the issue of lead ammo to drive change in the hunting community. Non-hunters, hunters and the birds all have much more to gain than lose by adopting this approach.

Matt Rodgers, DFO vice president and a club member since 2018, works for the Air Force and leads the environmental team at Buckley Space Force Base in Aurora. He enjoys anything to do with nature, from a never-ending project to transform his yard into a pollinator garden to training his yellow Lab, Bambi. He lives in Centennial with his wife and two children.

CONSERVATION

Chico Basin's bird-friendly ranchers aren't land board staff choice for new lease

Patrick O'Driscoll

With about 15 months to go before a new agricultural lease takes effect at Chico Basin Ranch, the Colorado State Land Board meets in November to decide which livestock operator will run cattle in one of the state's richest birdlife locales.

But if the board follows the recommendation of its "staff decision," it will mean an eviction notice for the conservation-focused, bird-friendly, family-run cattle company that has operated the state-owned ranch in El Paso and Pueblo counties for almost 25 years.

Ranchlands, the ranch-management business of three generations of the **Duke Phillips** family, runs cattle operations (and one bison herd) on five ranches in four states from Chico Basin, its headquarters since winning a 25-year lease there in 1999. Through the years, the Phillipses have welcomed birders and the public with an open-gate philosophy and commitment to holistic coexistence with the ranch's [abundant and diverse birds and other wildlife](#). Their openness has drawn thousands of birding visits (including several DFO field trips a year). The resulting eBird checklists have recorded more than 350 species on the 86,000-acre spread.

But in a Sept. 8 "notification of staff decision" letter to lease bidders, the land board's Pueblo office announced that board staff has "determined that it is in the best interest" of the land trust to award the agricultural lease to someone else: [Flying Diamond Ranch](#), a Kit Carson, CO outfit that is also family-owned. **Scott and Jean Johnson's** 25,000-acre, fifth-generation home place — in Cheyenne County about 115 miles northeast of Chico Basin — dates to 1907. The cattle company also manages about 25,000 acres of additional rangelands in Westcliffe, CO and on the Front Range.

The letter said the board staff's choice "still requires final approval" by the five-member land board at its Oct. 12 meeting in Denver. But after Ranchlands filed a formal appeal over the

Continued on page 25

proposed decision, the land board postponed the vote until its Nov. 8 meeting, also in Denver. Advocates for keeping Ranchlands in place under the new ranch lease intend to file written statements of support and speak in person or via live Zoom connection at the November meeting. Anyone can comment at the meeting or in writing online up to 24 hours beforehand. (*See link at bottom of this story*)

Over the past 24 years, Ranchlands has earned numerous awards for its land stewardship and biodiversity practices at Chico Basin. It received the “Excellence in Rangeland Conservation Award” (2003) from the Society for Range Management. Colorado Parks & Wildlife named it both Partner of the Year (2019) and Landowner of the Year (2008), and Colorado Association of Conservation Districts named it Conservationist of the Year (2017). It also was recognized as “an outstanding Holistic Management demonstration site” by Holistic Management International, which promotes soil health improvement. And in 2019, the southern Colorado-based Palmer Land Conservancy gave Ranchlands its Environmental Stewardship Award.

In a [7-minute film](#) produced to highlight the Phillipses’ record at Chico Basin and its other Colorado operation at Medano-Zapata Ranch in the San Luis Valley, the land conservancy declared: “When landowners need an innovative approach to land management — one that goes much deeper than simply turning a profit — there is one company whose name is synonymous with conservation-minded, large-scale agriculture: Ranchlands.”

With its stewardship record, the company was thought to have a strong chance to win the bidding for the next ranching lease, which formally takes effect on Jan. 1, 2025. But the new 10-year lease differs significantly from Ranchlands’ current 25-year contract. Besides being shorter, it covers only livestock and agriculture. Non-ag activities that the Phillipses handle now — birding, hunting, a bird banding station for spring and fall migration, and guest-ranch hospitality — will be under separate leases overseen directly by the land board staff.



Continued on page 26



Curve-billed Thrasher, regular resident of the ranch
Patrick O'Driscoll



Sign on main entry gate to Chico Basin Ranch
Patrick O'Driscoll

CHICO BASIN *cont from page 25*

Birding, a popular draw under Ranchlands' open-arms management, will suffer severely under the new model, whether Ranchlands operates the ranch or not. Land board staff has decided to shrink birder access, year-round now (weather permitting), to only 10 weeks a year (five each in spring and fall migration), only mornings until 1 p.m., at only three locations on the ranch, and only 20 birders a day maximum. The board staff's excuse for these extraordinary and unnecessary reductions in access — that they will "minimize" potential birder conflicts with ranching — addresses a non-existent problem: Except for one incident when a birder's car accidentally ran into fencing (which was repaired within a day), no conflicts have ever occurred between birders and Ranchlands.

At the land board's meeting in August, a parade of public commenters spoke in support of Ranchlands' bid to renew its lease at Chico Basin. And board Commissioner **Phillip Chavez** asked the staff for "clarification at a future meeting" about why existing leaseholders on larger state-owned ranches such as Chico Basin "do not have first right of refusal" to renew their leases before other prospective lessees may bid. Earlier this year, board staff sought open bids from all comers, including Ranchlands and Flying Diamond.

Agenda materials for the Chico Basin ranching lease, originally meant for the October meeting, indicate that of 11 bidders, Flying Diamond's bid was ranked highest, and Ranchlands' bid second-highest. Flying Diamond would pay the land board more than \$7.5 million over the 10-year course of the lease. The amount is based on a bid of \$35 for each "animal unit month" (AUM), a grazing formula tied to the amount of forage needed to feed each cow and calf.

Ranchlands' No. 2-ranked bid is \$25 for each AUM, for a total of about \$4.4 million for the 10-year lease. Although the dollar amounts differ considerably, the land board's own charter was changed in the 1990s from "maximum revenue" to "reasonable and consistent revenue over time." In addition, the two bids are much closer under land board evaluations that graded and ranked criteria from interviews and written proposals to land stewardship, financial return and local community stability. That scoring ranked Flying Diamond first with 92 points and Ranchlands a closer second with 86.6 points.

Supporters are likely to attend both October and November board meetings in person and via Zoom to speak in Ranchlands' favor. DFO's Conservation Committee and the DFO Board are considering a possible statement of support. DFO members (and anyone else) can speak in person or via Zoom at the meeting or send written comments to the land board online using the form at [this link](#). Written commenters are advised to send in their comments ahead of time but no later than midnight Nov. 6.

LAST WORD, LAST LOOK

Best *of the* nests

Up and down
Bear Creek, Great
Horned Owls
were busy birds
last spring . . .

Editor's note: On a DFO field trip last April in Jefferson County's Bear Creek Lake Park, member and photographer **Anne Craig** saw and photographed three different Great Horned Owl nests. Ever resourceful birds, they chose to hatch and raise offspring in an array of ways: Classic cavity nest, abandoned magpie nest, and a former Red-tailed Hawk nest.

Craig, whose own birding "patch" is along another stretch of water in the Bear Creek Greenbelt downstream, got to thinking about a connecting thread when she followed another Great Horned nest in the greenbelt all spring — and kept track of its fledged offspring though summer and into fall. That nest, too, had once been someone else's: Cooper's Hawks raised a brood of four young there in 2022.

Whatever the abode, these owls and their offspring were many things to behold. We're fortunate that Anne's discerning eye was there to capture telling moments. Here are her own Last Words and Last Looks at 2023's Great Horned Owls of Bear Creek.

All photos by Anne Craig.





Great Horned Owl nests of Bear Creek

Anne Craig

Last April, on a DFO field trip to Bear Creek Lake Park, we saw owl nests in three situations . . .

◀ Two owlets were huddled together in a cavity nest inside a large cottonwood. This particular nest site, just inside the park entrance, is well-known and has been used — not always successfully — for years. In fact, shortly after I took this photo, one of the owlets vanished. The remaining one eventually did fledge, but I haven't seen it (or looked for it) in months.

This female Great Horned Owl made do with the top of an old magpie nest. I believe this mama later had two owlets. ▶



Continued on page 29



◀ And this one looked supremely comfortable in an old Red-tailed Hawk nest high in a cottonwood tree. I believe there were three owlets in this nest. But partly because of flooding in the park, I didn't get back out to check on the progress of this nest and the one on the old magpie nest. So I don't know whether they fledged, or what became of the owlets.

No, these are *not* owls!
The Great Horned Owl nest that I watched all spring in the Bear Creek Greenbelt (just east of Bear Creek Lake Park) was in a former Cooper's Hawk nest from last year. We were able to view the owls that nested here on three DFO field trips in May and July. But this is how the very full nest looked in June 2022 just before the young hawks fledged. ▶



Continued on page 30



◀ And here's how the greenbelt nest looked in mid-April of this year. This particular Great Horned adult female had also nested in an old Cooper's Hawk nest last year, and by the time her pair of owlets fledged in 2022, that nest had all but disintegrated. That's one of the owlets under her right wing.

This late April view of the two greenbelt owlets in this year's nest shows its disintegration, too. ▶



Continued on page 31



◀ By the end of the first week of May, one of the owlets had vanished from the greenbelt nest (and from the greenbelt, too), so just one was left.

By mid-May, the sole owlet had fledged, never to return to the nest again. But here it is, relocated to the other side of Bear Creek. ▶



Continued on page 32



◀ Fast-forward three months: Here is that greenbelt owl in August. Its parents were dueting nightly — and maybe even scoping out this year's inventory of empty Cooper's Hawk nests in anticipation of next year's nesting.



Until the next Lark Bunting . . .
GOOD END-OF-AUTUMN BIRDING!

Immature Great Horned Owl
in Bear Creek Greenbelt grass



THE LARK BUNTING

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 59 | ISSUE 12 | DECEMBER 2023

DFOBIRDS.ORG

CONSERVATION / BIRDING

The Swainson's Hawks
of Denver's Bluff Lake

PAGE 19

BIRDING HOTSPOTS.ORG

DFO volunteers help
with new app—won't you?

PAGE 14

FIELD TRIPS IN FOCUS

Watch the birdies,
DFO field trippers!

PAGE 16

LAST WORD, LAST LOOK

DFO photog's views of
Boulder Co summer birds

PAGE 27

dfo
DENVER FIELD
ORNITHOLOGISTS

Northern Harrier
Coal Creek Open Space, Jefferson County
Rob Raker





ON THE COVER

Northern Harrier: A year-round resident that captivates as it cruises quietly by



Robert Raker, a DFO member since 2014, is a former environmental scientist, adventurer and filmmaker on many expeditions around the world. Now retired, he enjoys birding and photography and still goes rock-climbing and skiing.

It's the end of revolving-door time in our corner of the bird (and birding) world. As the last stragglers of Colorado's spring-summer residents flee south for warmth, other migrants from the north (especially waterfowl) are beginning to settle in for winter among us. One bird's cold, another bird's warm, right?

But let's not forget those that, like most of us, are around through all four seasons. Old reliables in the backyard, at the lake, across the field. To my eye, there aren't many year-rounders here on the edge of the Plains that capture attention like the Northern Harrier does (*Circus Hudsonius*). Season in and out,

this hawk looks effortless as it makes its daily rounds on a low, slow glide, wings held in a cruise-control V like a Turkey Vulture. Skimming silently just a few feet above grassland, marsh and farm field, it drops down now and then to nail down breakfast or lunch in the weeds.

The one on the cover of *The Lark Bunting* this month was hunting in early October in Coal Creek Open Space in Jefferson County when DFO member **Rob Raker's** lens captured it: Banking sharply, in perpendicular grace, eyes (and ears) on the prize. This one's likely a female, probably a juvenile. (Adult males are blueish-gray above, white below, with black wingtips.) With that owl-like face (the better to hear voles and other rodents below), it's natural at first glance to do a double-take: Owl hunting in daylight? But harriers are slender and long-winged, not chunky, and then there's that unmistakable flash of white rump above its long tail.

One reason I like Northern Harriers is that their deliberate, unhurried course — whether in low flight or pausing on the ground in tall grass — makes them so much easier to photograph. Dense stands of that grass are when they nest, too. *Birds of the World* tells us they are the only North American example of the genus *Circus*, so-named for the species' circling flight path (from *kirkos*, ancient Greek for "circle"). With their ethereal coloring, males are nicknamed "gray ghosts."

Harrier males sleep around, breeding with one or two but sometimes up to five mates. That number depends on how much food is around, because while female harriers incubate the eggs and rear the nestlings, the males are the principal providers of food for their mates and offspring.

Fun fact: Males court females with "sky-dancing," an up-and-down series of fluttery swoops, sometimes across more than half a mile's distance. Courting pairs cement their bonds flying together in mid-air "food transfers," where typically a male drops a mouse or other prey from above into the female's talons.

Although it is considered a species of "least concern," populations of Northern Harrier in the US have declined in recent decades, and more than 14 states in the Midwest and Northeast now consider it threatened, endangered or "of special concern." The unsurprising culprit is continuing loss of wetland and undisturbed grassland habitats.

— **Patrick O'Driscoll**, editor



IN THIS ISSUE

- 2 On the Cover**
Northern Harrier: A year-round resident that captivates as it cruises quietly by
- 5 From the President**
Brrrr! and birds and books:
It's my favorite season to curl up and read
- 6 DFO News Notes**
- 16 Field Trips in Focus**
In Focus: October field trippers!
- 19 Conservation**
Nesting success: Tracing Swainson's Hawks' 2023 life cycle at Denver's Bluff Lake
- 22 Conservation**
December 16: Join in Denver Christmas Bird Count!
- 24 Conservation**
State rejects longtime, bird-friendly Chico Basin Ranch operator for new livestock tenant
- 26 Last Word, Last Look**
Close to home, close up:
How one birder filled his lens this summer

The Lark Bunting newsletter of Denver Field Ornithologists is published online monthly at dfobirds.org except for joint issues in July–August and February–March.

PUBLICATION STAFF

Editor

Patrick O'Driscoll

Assistant Editor

Mike Fernandez

Photo Editor

Jim Esten

Layout and Design

Jennie Dillon

Contributors this issue

Jason B. Bidgood, Abby Burk, Anne Craig, Jim Esten, Mike Fernandez, George Ho Jr., Linda Hodges, Ann Johnson, Roger Koester, Bill Maynard, Rob Raker, Courtney Rella, Diane Roberts, John Salisbury, David Suddjian, Sharon Tinianow, Michelle Trotter

CONTRIBUTE TO THE NEWSLETTER

Submit original articles or story ideas to the editor at patodrisk@gmail.com.

Send image-file photos of birds or bird outings to the photo editor at jcesten@gmail.com.

Editors reserve the right to accept and edit suitable articles and photos for publication.

NEWSLETTER ADVERTISING

The Lark Bunting does not accept or contain paid advertising. DFO **AdBIRDtisements** are FREE to club members to seek or sell bird-related equipment, supplies, books and decorative items (artwork, photos, clothing, note cards, etc.).

- Ads must include name, email and/or telephone number, and may include weblink if items offered online
- Ads may be edited for inappropriate content or excessive length (125-word limit); ONE photo or image per ad
- Ads do not carry over each month. To renew, resubmit by next deadline
- Available *only* to DFO members
- Deadline: last day of month except January and June (*The Lark Bunting* does not publish in February and July)

Send AdBIRDtisement materials to editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com.

Next deadline: Tuesday, November 30



A community of birders, learning and acting together for avian wildlife

Denver Field Ornithologists is an all-volunteer organization that conducts hundreds of free birdwatching field trips throughout the year and welcomes participation and membership by all. DFO promotes enjoyment of nature, the study of birds, and protection of them and their habitats in greater Denver and beyond.

In addition to field trips, evening programs and birding workshops, DFO conducts community science in the field, including the spring Hawk Watch raptor migration count on Dinosaur Ridge.

DFO awards grants annually for bird-related research, education and conservation projects in Colorado. For more information, visit the [Research, Education & Conservation Grants](#) page on the DFO website.

DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and financial contributions to DFO's three giving funds are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

DFO OFFICERS

President

Sharon Tinianow
sharontinianow@gmail.com

Vice President

Matt Rodgers (Interim)
mattrodgers79@gmail.com

Secretary

Nathan Bond
dfobirds.secretary@gmail.com

Treasurer

Kathy Holland
kcloudview@comcast.net

Past President

Susan Blansett
susan.blansett@gmail.com

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Karen Drozda
drozforte@aol.com

Mary Geder
mfg5000@live.com

Cyndy Johnson
cyndyjohnson28@msn.com

Tina Jones
tjcalliope@hotmail.com

Roger Koester
koester1949@gmail.com

Patrick O'Driscoll
patodrisk@gmail.com

Janet Peters
j.f.peters58@gmail.com

Courtney Rella
dr.cawtney@gmail.com

David Suddjian
dsuddjian@gmail.com

Bill Turner
toursbyturner@aol.com

Elaine Wagner
ewagner1000@yahoo.com

COMMITTEE CHAIRS & ROLES

Better Birding Skills

Sharon Tinianow (acting)
sharontinianow@gmail.com

Communications & Outreach

Michael Fernandez (acting)
mikefernandez@icloud.com

Conservation

Courtney Rella
dr.cawtney@gmail.com

Field Trips

David Suddjian
daidsuddjian@gmail.com

Finance

Roger Koester
koester1949@gmail.com

Grants

Jill Boice
jill@booksandcats.net

Hawk Watch

Janet Peters
j.f.peters58@gmail.com

Membership

Cyndy Johnson
cyndyjohnson28@msn.com

Nominations

Mary Geder
mfg5000@live.com

Programs Director

Bill Turner
toursbyturner@aol.com

Historian

Kristine Haglund
kahaglund1@aol.com

Web Administrator

Jim Esten
admin@dfobirds.org

Zoom Coordinator

Jim Esten
admin@dfobirds.org

DFO ONLINE

Website

dfobirds.org

Facebook Group

facebook.com/groups/dfobirds

Instagram

instagram.com/denverfieldornithologists

CONTACT

Email

df0.commsgroup@gmail.com

Via website (at bottom of home page)

dfobirds.org

US Mail

Attn: Kathy Holland, Treasurer, DFO
351 E Caley Ave, Centennial, CO 80121-2201

LEARN MORE

Membership — Join or Renew

dfobirds.org/DFO/Membership.aspx

Field Trips — Explore / Sign Up

dfobirds.org/FieldTrips.aspx

Volunteering

dfobirds.org/DFO/Volunteer.aspx

Charitable Giving

dfobirds.org/DFO/Donations.aspx

DFO Merch Store

zazzle.com/store/official_dfo_shop



FROM THE PRESIDENT

Brrrr! and birds and books: It's my favorite season to curl up and read

As I am writing this, our first winter storm has just passed through Denver, with sub-freezing temperatures and six inches of snow. Fall is definitely heading for winter.

For me, it's time to think about the bird-related books I want to curl up with during these months of short days and long nights. A couple of them were recently recommended to me by two DFO board members, and I have a couple of my own to recommend.

Janet Peters, DFO's Hawk Watch Committee chair, told me about [*Fuzz: When Nature Breaks the Law*](#) by *New York Times* best-selling author **Mary Roach**. This entertaining collection of stories about human-wildlife conflict is not only about birds, but avian species are the subject of several chapters. The author's website describes her approach as combining forensic science and conservation genetics to explain animal behaviors. In the process, Roach reveals as much about people as she does about nature's lawbreakers. One reviewer's comment: "Nobody does weird science quite like Mary Roach."

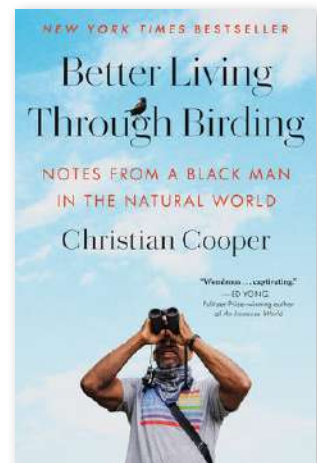
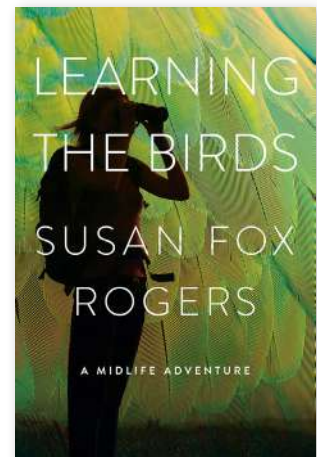
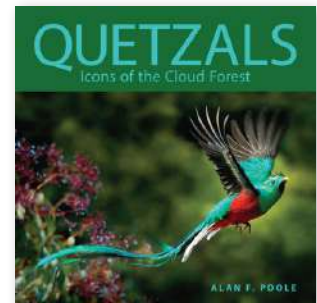
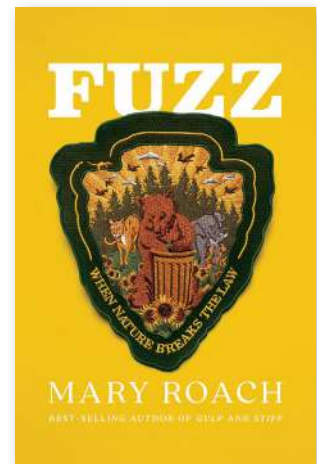
Kathy Holland, DFO's treasurer, recommends [*Quetzals: Icons of the Cloud Forest*](#) by renowned ornithologist **Alan F. Poole**. This book is a celebration of an alluring group of birds native to the cloud forests of Mexico, Central and South America. Poole details not only the natural history of these birds but their cultural significance to indigenous peoples as well. Vivid photos, beautiful artwork and engaging writing make this book one that I plan to seek out.

Fuzz and *Quetzals* are great science-focused books, two among many more out there. But this past year I read two bird books in a different genre altogether. [*Learning the Birds: A Midlife Adventure*](#) by **Susan Fox Rogers** and [*Better Living Through Birding: Notes From a Black Man in the Natural World*](#) by another *NYT* best-selling author, **Christian Cooper**, are memoirs by birders that reveal what birds and birding can teach us.

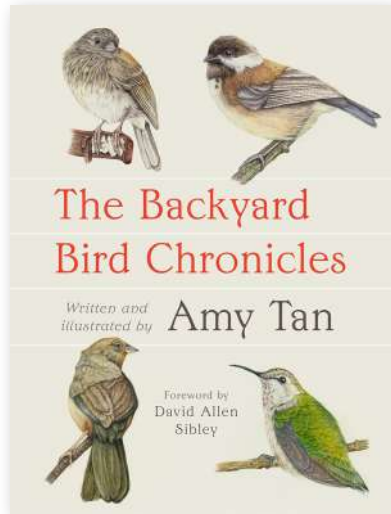
Rogers is known for her mastery of the essay. In 2020 she wrote *When Birds Are Near*, an anthology of essays on our pastime. In *Learning the Birds*, she blends history, science, travel and adventure with her journey through midlife. It is an authentic and sometimes humorous look at the pursuit we all enjoy and the challenges we face as we navigate life.

You may recall Cooper as the Black birder who, in 2020, was falsely accused of harassment by a white woman he encountered walking her dog off leash in New York's Central Park. When I cracked open *Better Living Through Birding*, I assumed his viral news story would form the core of the book. Although Cooper devotes the first chapter to that incident and the controversy that arose from it, his writing covers a lifetime of birding begun when he was just 10 years old. He takes us through his work as a writer and editor at Marvel Comics (where he wrote the first gay storylines) as well as along on birding expeditions all over the world.

There are plenty more bird-related books where those came from, of course. A quick online search for some lists of birding books revealed new titles as well as older ones that



Continued on page 6



are still in print. When the itch to travel returns, I plan to seek out [Fifty Places to Go Birding Before You Die](#) by **Chris Santella** so I can be ready. [The Backyard Bird Chronicles](#) by bestselling novelist **Amy Tan** is due out in April 2024 (with foreword by **David Allen Sibley**). I have enjoyed Tan's other books, so this seems like a good choice.

To build your own bird reading list, check out these recommendations online:

- [Penguin Random House](#)
- [National Audubon Society](#)
- [Walden Pond Books](#)
- [21 Bird Books for the Birder in All of Us](#)

Happy reading (and birding) everyone!

DFO President **Sharon Tinianow**, who joined the club in 2016, was previously vice president (2021-23) and is a former editor of *The Lark Bunting*. She began birding in an ornithology class in college, and she retired as assistant director of CU Boulder's Museum of Natural History.

DFO NEWS

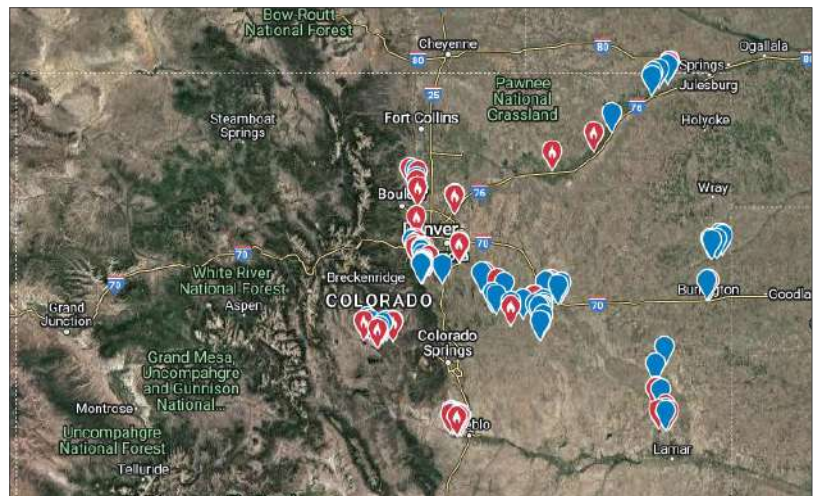
DFO News Notes

Patrick O'Driscoll

Got blurbs on birds? Share with **DFO News Notes**: Colorado birding newsbits, eBird milestones, tales from the trail, birding life (and life birds!), etc. Email your items, photos, links and anything else to patodrisk@gmail.com.

DFO DOES IT AGAIN: ALREADY, MOST FIELD TRIPS IN ONE YEAR!

Where was DFO birding in October? All over the place, on 21 outings on 18 different calendar days. Field trip birders recorded 149 species and submitted a combined 129 eBird checklists. And the very last of those October field trips — a Halloween day excursion into Park County — broke the club's record for the number of field trips in a single year. That was with two full months of bird outings still ahead. Check our DFO's October field trip report for the particulars: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/163302>. Note as well the map of our trips reaching far northeast, east and southeast on major outings, into the mountains at Park County, south to Pueblo, and along the Front Range from Boulder to Douglas counties. Plenty more trips are on the November calendar. Check them out at <https://dfobirds.org/FieldTrips/UpcomingTrips.aspx>.



PRAIRIE HAWKS ARE FOCUS OF NEXT BIRD BOMBS ON NOVEMBER 16

Late fall into winter is a wonderful time for hawk watching in Colorado. The next DFO BIRD BOMBS on Thursday, Nov. 16 will help you identify and enjoy Colorado's *Buteo* hawks. Register here for [BIRD BOMBS: Prairie Hawks](#). And the

Continued on page 7

video of the most recent bird ID miniwebinar, [BIRD BOMBS: Colorado Sea Ducks](#) (Oct. 19), which focused on identifying our three scoters and the related Long-tailed Duck, is now available to view. It and the other 20 previous episodes of BIRD BOMBS are in DFO's [BIRD BOMBS video archive](#) on the club website. Especially helpful for late autumn birding are these three past episodes: [Looking at Loons](#), [Better Duck](#), and [Fall Sparrows](#). While you're at the website, check out DFO's Field Trip Calendar, with openings on many great upcoming trips.



RENEWING YOUR MEMBERSHIP? DON'T FORGET GRANTS FUND

It's time to renew your membership — and while you're at it, how about contributing something to DFO's Research, Education, and Conservation Fund? This worthwhile fund awards grants for bird-related projects in three areas of study: education in the knowledge of birds, research in ornithology, and conservation of birds and their habitat. DFO has been awarding these modest grants (typically between \$500 and \$2,000) since 1994, when **Mary Hope Robinson** donated \$15,000 to establish DFO's Educational Endowment Fund. The name was changed in 2012, but not the focus. To contribute, go to the [DFO Donations page](#) on the club website. Something else you can do: If you know researchers, educators or conservationists in these endeavors who can use a financial hand in pursuing their project, tell them about our fund and invite them to apply at our [grants fund webpage](#) on the DFO website.

AOS INTENDS TO WEED OUT HUMAN NAMES OF US, CANADIAN BIRDS

In a surprise announcement that instantly became the talk of the North American birding world, the American Ornithological Society has created the [English Bird Names Project](#) to gradually convert bird names containing human names to more descriptive monikers. Although it grows out of the

discussion about dropping the names of 18th and 19th century men linked to racism, misogyny and other objectionable behavior, advocates at AOS want to remove human names to shift the naming focus to birds themselves and the physical, behavioral and geographical characteristics that help define each species.

If the spirited discussion is any indication, this topic will bubble indefinitely. (The ornithological society intends to start a pilot project with the first few names in 2024.) Here in Colorado, a lively conversation has continued via the CoBirds email list-serv. One Colorado-specific point of exchange regards Say's Phoebe, named after the scientist who first encountered the species near present-day Cañon City on an exploratory expedition in 1819. DFO member **Megan Miller**, 31, a passionate birder since her pre-teens, wrote to express support for the overall name-change effort. Now a grad student in bird biology at CSU-Pueblo, she ended her post with, "I think Say's Phoebe should be called Sunrise Phoebe" — a reference to the warmth of its buffy cinnamon breast, but also to the other half of its name. Jumping in first to rave in reply was **Ted Floyd**, Colorado birding author and editor of the American Birding Association magazine: "What a marvelous suggestion. The name 'Phoebe' refers to a sun deity . . . and indicates brightness or radiance. Which, if you've ever seen the bird on the prairie in the sunrise, is the essence of perfection." Floyd added, "I hope someone's listening" (at AOS).



Say's Phoebe
Patrick O'Driscoll

Continued on page 8

MORE ARSENAL BISON, MORE BIRDS AND BIRDING? HMM . . .

The Rocky Mountain Arsenal National Wildlife Refuge in Adams County near Denver International Airport is planning to expand the “prairie” home where its buffalo roam. Next year, refuge managers intend to expand by one-third the grassland area where its herd of 250 bison can graze (and be seen by local lovers of charismatic Plains megafauna). For people living near the northeastern part of the refuge, the bison will “basically be in your backyard,” refuge specialist **Tom Ronning** told *The Colorado Sun*, the Denver-based online news website. The overall aim is to improve the condition of the Arsenal’s remnant patch of prairie within the urban footprint of greater Denver.

Read the full story at [this link](#).

FREE EBIRD WEBINAR NOV. 16 ON NEW 2023 SPECIES UPDATES

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology’s eBird and *Birds of the World* staffs will host a free webinar on **Thursday, Nov. 16** to discuss what’s new in the latest [bird taxonomy update](#). The 2023 revision, which includes a net gain of 111 bird species for a new worldwide total of 11,017, is now complete across all eBird platforms, including eBird, Macaulay Library, Merlin, and *Birds of the World*. The 90-minute webinar requires registration at [this link](#) and begins at **10 a.m. MST**. This *Birds of the World* Discovery Webinar will include a brief overview of this year’s updates and efforts to standardize bird taxonomy across all major global checklists, and a presentation on “a few interesting taxonomic shifts.” The main North American species changes this year include the “re-lumping” of Cordilleran and Pacific-slope Flycatchers into the single Western Flycatcher, and the split of Northern Goshawk into separate American and Eurasian species. For those who cannot attend the webinar “live,” a video of the presentation will be available within 5 business days on the [Birds of the World blog](#).

FLYING INSECT MIGRATE, TOO — AND HEAT IS LETHAL CHALLENGE

A new study published in the journal *Nature Climate Change* by researchers at the University of Denver and the George Institute of Technology suggests that flying insects, many of them important pollinators, are migrating away from warming areas more slowly than their non-flying insect counterparts, and thus appear to be dying at rater rates. While some land creatures,

birds, even vegetation may “climb” into higher elevations to escape rising temperatures both globally and in Colorado, life forms are faced with more than just how warm or cold it is. Higher elevations in Colorado mean less oxygen, which is one of the factors affecting at-risk flying insects here. The researchers analyzed data on 800 insect species from around the world, including Colorado. For more details, read the full story by Colorado Public Radio at [this link](#).

IT’S OFFICIAL: BACHMAN’S WARBLER, 9 PACIFIC SPECIES “EXTINCT”

The US Fish & Wildlife Service formally declared Bachman’s Warbler and nine Hawai’ian/Pacific bird species extinct in October, years after proposing the action and decades of fruitless searching for any evidence they still exist. The warbler, once a denizen of swampy bottomland forests of the Southeast and Midwest, was put on the Endangered Species List 56 years ago. It’s last confirmed sighting was in Louisiana in 1988. “Reliable” observations of sightings in South Carolina’s Congaree National Park raised hopes in the early 2000s. But a formal investigation concluded the those were misidentifications by sight of Hooded Warblers and by sound of Northern Parula songs. Read Fish & Wildlife’s news release about the declarations at [this link](#).



Bachman's Warbler
Audubon's Birds of America

DFO joins Colorado Gives: Make this December 5 a big day of extra giving

Mike Fernandez

This year, Denver Field Ornithologists has joined Colorado Gives, the nonprofit fundraising effort that provides grassroots donors an online directory of more than 1,600 charitable, nonprofit organizations across the state. As we count down to Colorado Gives Day in early December, consider giving an extra donation to DFO, and even sharing our Colorado Gives link with friends and family to increase the response.

Since its inception in 2010, Colorado Gives has facilitated the raising of more than \$415 million for community organizations from every sector of service and endeavor. Its one-stop-shopping convenience allows donors to contribute easily and securely in one place, on one day, to all their favorite causes and organizations.

Its central event is Colorado Gives Day, a 24-hour focused appeal held annually in the period between Thanksgiving and the Christmas-Hannukah-Kwanzaa seasonal holidays. This year's day of giving is **Tuesday, Dec. 5**. But early giving has already been underway since Nov. 1 at [DFO's page on the Colorado Gives website](#).

Although DFO remains in very good financial standing, we have signed on this year with Colorado Gives to boost income so we can enhance our club offerings, including the Hawk Watch project that counts spring-migrating birds of prey from atop Dinosaur Ridge in Jefferson County. DFO took this important conservation program under its wing in 2020 to save it from a possible lapse in its critical community science work. Dinosaur Ridge is one of nine monitoring stations that represent the western region in the Raptor Population Index. Our Dinosaur Ridge effort tracks 17 species of raptors, including two that are rarely monitored elsewhere in North America: Ferruginous Hawk and Prairie Falcon.

Contributing to DFO via Colorado Cares is easy and convenient. Visit the [Giving Methods](#) page on the [Colorado Gives website](#) to donate using any of nine different ways to make one-time or recurring payments.



While you're on DFO's Colorado Gives page, consider also clicking the link to "[Share This Organization](#)" by email or on social media (Facebook, X/Twitter) with family and friends. It brings up a draft email or Facebook or X/Twitter posts with content about us and our Colorado Gives role. If the email link does not load for your email service, simply copy the DFO page link into your email and ask your email recipients to scroll down to read the DFO background.

Among a number of bonus awards to nonprofits this year is a "New Nonprofit Prize" for which DFO is eligible: A \$5,000 award to the new nonprofit that raises the most online through [coloradogives.org](#) during the Nov. 1 to Dec. 4 "early giving" period.

*A DFO member since 2014, **Mike Fernandez** edits the mid-month DFO Digest and is assistant editor of The Lark Bunting. A neighborhood and schools advocate for 40 years, he is a retired Interior Department communications manager.*

FALL PROGRAM PREVIEW

Wildlife, Wetlands and the Everglades

Lauren Jonaitis and Stephanie Clements

Monday, November 27

7 p.m. MST via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)



These are perilous times for the Everglades. South Florida's birding-rich "River of Grass" seems in constant turmoil, whether it's a hidden legion of alien, wildlife-killing Burmese pythons run amok or the unending power struggle over the control and quality of water and the threat of encroaching development across the region.

On the Monday after Thanksgiving, DFO's final evening program of the autumn 2023 season will explore the rich history and science of this vast, iconic landscape with two Everglades advocates from the [Tropical Audubon Society](#) of Miami. "Wildlife, Wetlands and the Everglades" (**Nov. 27, 7 p.m. MST via Zoom**) will feature Tropical Audubon senior Conservation director **Lauren Jonaitis** and Education & Advocacy director **Stephanie Clements**.

"You will gain knowledge about the birds and other wildlife who depend on the Everglades habitats and discover why this ecosystem is so important ecologically, culturally and economically to Florida," said Jonaitis, who works on the "project delivery team" for several Everglades restoration projects. She joined Tropical

Audubon last year to focus on expanding and amplifying the organization's role and reach across South Florida. Previously, she worked for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission to reduce artificial light pollution effects on sea turtles and their coastal nesting habitat.

Jonaitis also worked in private industry as an environmental/coastal scientist, focused on permitting and dune restoration and maintenance. Currently, she is vice president of Policy for the Society of Conservation Biology North America. She is also the society's Communications chair. She holds a bachelor's degree in zoology from State University of New York at Oswego and a master's in conservation and population biology from Bowling Green State University in OH.

Clements oversees Tropical Audubon's flagship Ambassador Program, which cultivates volunteer environmental advocates across Miami. She is now working to broaden its membership among underrepresented and excluded communities. She earned her doctorate in biology from the University of Miami, where her dissertation focused on conservation of reptiles and amphibians in human-modified landscapes of Miami and Costa Rica. In her doctoral work, Clements studied both native and non-native reptiles and amphibians in the Everglades and other prominent South Florida ecosystems. She worked previously as an interpretive ranger in the National Park Service, field manager for an environmental advocacy group, and as a children's educational instructor at a zoo.



Tami Bulow

Birding the Lower Rio Grande Valley: Top 5 Hotspots and More

Tamie Bulow

Monday, January 22, 2024

7 p.m. MST via Zoom

This presentation, originally planned for October, had to be postponed. It is now rescheduled as the first of DFO's 2024 winter-spring monthly programs. Look for registration details in the next issue of The Lark Bunting.

A birding adventure to deep South Texas can be one of the most exhilarating and rewarding trips in the continental US. Owing to its famous, border-defining river, the Lower Rio Grande Valley actually lies farther south than one-third of Mexico. That accident of political geography offers the opportunity to find vagrant bird rarities from Mexico on a regular basis, as well as the more than 500 species of birds that migrate seasonally through the area or call it home.

Former DFO president **Tamie Bulow** (2005-2007) calls it home, too. Before moving to the Lower Rio Grande Valley to manage the South Padre Island Birding & Nature Center, she worked as manager of conferences, conventions and tours for Colorado-based [American Birding Association](#). Now retired, Bulow lives in the border city of Harlingen, TX but continues to dabble in birding work.

In her free evening presentation on Jan. 22, “Birding the Lower Rio Grande Valley: Top 5 Hotspots and More,” Bulow says she will reveal “five places that are a must visit” for birders, “and another 30 or 40 that won’t disappoint.” She also says there are “15-20 specialties that you must come to the Rio Grande Valley for if you want them on your North American List.” Birds like Great Kiskadee and Green Jay, Buff-bellied Hummingbird and Altamira Oriole, Grove-billed Ani and Green Kingfisher.

Bulow has more advice: “Spring migration is best, but a mild winter can’t be beat for delightful birding. Top tip: Avoid summer. You will thank me later.”

Although she was born in Boston, Bulow’s family moved around — Connecticut, Denver, Richmond, Atlanta. “Twelve schools in 12

years,” she says. “Mom was a backyard birder, so I grew up filling feeders and calling out birds that were feeding there. When I got my first house, the first thing I did was hang a bird feeder, and then chuckled to myself, ‘I must be a birder!’ ”

She returned to Colorado as a student at the University of Denver and worked after graduation at local ice arenas, managing the DU Arena and its youth sports program. Later, her travel as a sales rep for skate maker Riedell Skates “fed my birding addiction.”

Still later, a transfer to Albuquerque led her to start “Thursday Birders” there — like Denver’s own Tuesday Birders weekly meetup. She would become president of Central New Mexico Audubon Society and VP of the state Audubon organization. She says that prepared her to be DFO president after she moved back to Denver.

Left jobless after years with ABA, she applied to be director of South Padre Island Birding & Nature Center in Texas and landed the job. During her years in south Texas, she also managed nature tourism for Chambers County east of Houston and as executive director of the Texas Tropical Trail region for the Texas Historical Commission.

Today she writes grants for Space Coast Birding & Wildlife Festival (Port Canaveral, FL), “But basically I am retired,” she says, though she does “some bird guiding” at local festivals and privately, and volunteers for the Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival. A Texas Master Naturalist, she is working on learning the butterflies and plants of the Lower Rio Grande Valley.

MONTHLY PROGRAMS

If you missed it: DFO's October program

The DFO website contains a video archive of our monthly fall, winter and spring lecture programs on the Zoom platform. If you could not “attend” our most recent program live, click the link below to view the recording.



zoom

Thanks to DFO historian
Kris Haglund for
curating and posting the
program videos on the
DFO website on the
[Past Programs](#) page.

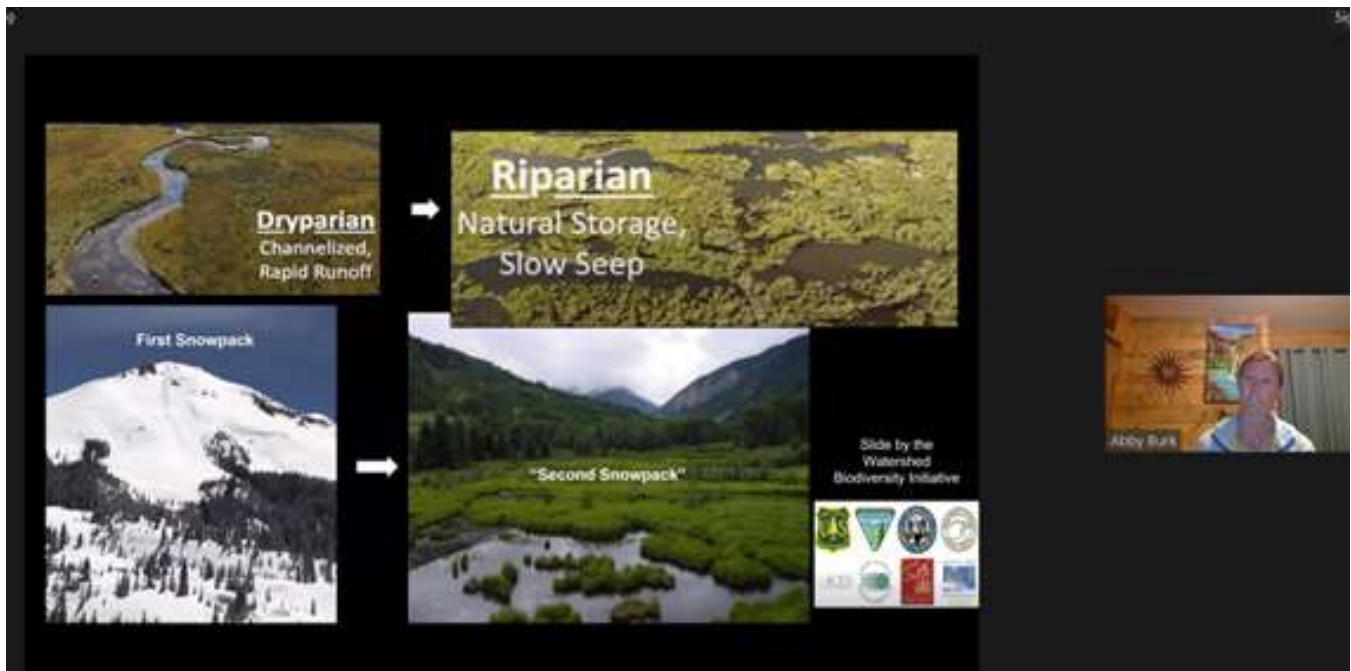


OCTOBER 23

Water Flows Together: Opportunities for Birds and People in 2023-24 Abby Burk

WATCH ONLINE

Abby Burk, senior manager of Audubon Rockies Western Rivers program, takes us downstream through the many facets of Colorado's riparian resources, especially the state's namesake river. The waters of the Colorado “reach all four corners of our state,” she says, owing to the modern movement of water for municipal use and irrigation. But “the river that we all depend on depends on us right now,” she adds. Everywhere, stream restoration is a major issue. Burk's presentation is a succinct and understandable tutorial on the ups and downs of riparian resource issues, from “thousands of miles of degraded, incised streams disconnected from their floodplains” to the tricky restoration of headwaters and wet meadows in light of our increasingly variable climate.



DFO: It's ALL of us

In full-page displays in 2022, we introduced you to Joe, Megan and Emma, three of your more than 675 fellow members of Denver Field Ornithologists. A year later, our membership message still rings true:

Whether we are in DFO for its hundreds of FREE field trips (unparalleled *anywhere*) . . .

Or for monthly programs by exceptional speakers . . .

Or for to sharpen our birding skills in workshops . . .

Or simply to share in appreciating and conserving birds and their habitats in Colorado . . .

Our strength is in BELONGING and in SHARING — in our love for birds and their place among us . . . and our place among them

**Help keep DFO strong
and your connection
to Colorado birds and
birding vital**

**Join DFO or renew your membership
NOW before year's end**

And while you're there, consider
a tax-free, year-end contribution to one
of DFO's three giving funds

**CLICK HERE FOR DFO
MEMBERSHIP PAGE**

dfo
DENVER FIELD
ORNITHOLOGISTS



BIRDING NEWS

BirdingHotspots.org: With your help, new app will pack wealth of Colorado birding info

Ann Johnson

The hobby of watching birds has grown tremendously in the past two decades, thanks in part to electronic-era marvels that make it easier and more rewarding. We have ever more sophisticated field guides on your smart phone or in your back pocket; bird ID apps like Merlin, with its encyclopedic command of species images and sounds; and the data-crunching wonder of eBird, where you can keep your birding stats and file your checklists from the field via its GPS-assisted phone app. All are for free.

With every eBird checklist, you also participate in the world's largest citizen science project, contributing fresh data on bird numbers and distribution to scientists, researchers and your fellow eBird users.



Smartphone view of Colorado page on BirdingHotspots.com

But why stop there? A new state-by-state project based on eBird's global grid of frequently birded "hotspots" will augment the eBird app with practical local information about those places for birders. Imagine embarking on a cross-country road trip of various eBird hotspots with a rich directory of their physical features, infrastructure and birding advice at your fingertips: Habitat facts, photo views of key features, location tips, trail maps and info, restrooms and parking, access points, accessibility details and more.

That's the vision of BirdingHotspots.org, an open-source venture created by volunteer eBird hotspot reviewer **Ken Ostermiller** and software developer **Adam Jackson**, both from Ohio. Much like eBird itself, the information will be crowdsourced from birders like you, for birders like you. It is meant to enhance eBird's thousands of defined hotspots with on-the-ground info for birders unfamiliar with them.

For years, birders have been asking eBird for such information. Although eBird's creator, the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology, agreed it is a good idea, the lab's resources are committed to scientific data. Today eBird collects and analyzes bird occurrence statistics to determine abundance and distribution.

Ostermiller and Jackson consulted the eBird team early in the process so their development could sync with eBird principles. They hope that someday it can become fully integrated and maintained by eBird staff. But they are careful to note that at this stage, Birding Hotspots is not affiliated with eBird. Their first aim is to prove it will work.

So far, 30 states including Colorado have their own pages on the Birding Hotspots website. All are works in progress — Colorado alone has 3,542 eBird hotspots, but just one-third of them have content so far. This effort relies on birder-users like you to add depth, detail and images from your favorite eBird hotspots. Already, these enhancements are becoming a useful resource for new birders, traveling birders, and local stalwarts.

Continued on page 15



Birding Hotspots

Where to Go Birding



Wilson's Phalarope
Jim Esten



Red-winged Blackbird
Jim Esten

BIRDING HOTSPOTS *cont from page 14*

On Colorado's page, Denver Field Ornithologists and Colorado Field Ornithologists are partnering with initial information and volunteers. CFO is supplying data from its Colorado Birding by County website. DFO is contributing volunteer editing by Field Trip Committee members and leaders **Laura Steadman, Diane Roberts** and **David Suddjian**. They and others will review and approve uploaded photos and suggested information while also contributing their own hotspot knowledge.

Becoming a contributor is simple and straightforward. Say you want to include information about your own favorite hotspots. Click on "Colorado" on the list of states on the BirdingHotspots.org home page. Either choose the county by clicking "View Region List" above the state map at right, or click the "Find Hotspots" box on the left, which lists all Colorado hotspots in alphabetical order. Click on one you want to add information to. Does it have photos of the area? Does it give a first-time visitor reliable intel about what birds and habitat to expect, how to get there, where to park, special birds of note, and trail and restroom info?

If no photos yet, the next time you visit, snap a few cell phone photos of the area (landscape / horizontal orientation works best) and upload them to the website. If the written information beyond photos is blank or sparse and sketchy, write and submit your own suggested details and edits. Once a reviewer/editor has approved them, you are a valued contributor to the project.

From then on, think about each hotspot when you go birding. When you get home, look to add more details and photos about it. You could even devote an afternoon or two just documenting your favorite hotspots. One more photo tip: Many larger birding destinations (parks, refuges and the like) have multiple hotspots, each of which deserves its own photos, too. There's really no hotspot you can't help complete or improve. When you visit one, add your tips and observations about them to Birding Hotspots.

For more about how to use this app and contribute photos and words, view any of the first three videos on this how-to page on [my own website](#). The other two videos address supporting individuals and organizations. And if you have more questions or want to help with general suggestions or editing, go to the Birding Hotspots Contact Us page and drop them a note.

Ann Johnson, a lifelong birder in Iowa, is DFO's longtime web designer and online troubleshooter. She is the 2023 recipient of DFO's highest honor, the Ptarmigan Award.



FIELD TRIPS IN FOCUS

In Focus: October field trippers!

Here's our third installment of **Field Trips in Focus**, with DFO field trippers out birding on October outings. Our goal remains to include in each month's newsletter at least one such photo from every DFO field trip the previous month. This month we have images from six of the month's 21 trips.

C'mon, let's get a picture from EVERY field trip in November! If you're on a DFO outing in November, take a few shots of your fellow birders and send us the best! It could be hiking the trail, taking a lunch break, scoping a distant bird, or just a candid moment. Have fun with it!

Send your .JPG or .PNG photo files, with date/location of your DFO trip and any individual IDs, if needed, to editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com and CC: to photo editor **Jim Esten** at jcesten@gmail.com. Deadline is the last day of the month, **no later than Thursday, Nov. 30**. Again, photos of field trip people, not birds!

Thanks!

OCTOBER 8 The Big Sit, Chatfield SP

Leader
Joey Kellner

Participants
Jill Holden, Michelle Trotter, Lorna Thomas,
Sofia Prado-Irwin, Lorraine Dixon-Jones,
Linda Purcell, Diane Roberts, Evan Appel,
Jason Bidgood, and at least 31 other drop-bys

Joey Kellner, left, and others scoping
Chatfield Reservoir on Oct. 8 at annual Big Sit
(Jason Bidgood)



OCTOBER 10 Republican River Management area/ "Pipit Hill" (Yuma County)

Leader
Gary Witt

Participants
Ajit and Liza Antony, Wes Donnell, Gregg Goodrich,
Ann Troth, Benjamin Jacques, David Suddjian,
Kenneth Stuckey, Diane Roberts, Deb Piranian

Lunch break on Oct. 10 trip to Republican SWA
and Pipit Hill in Yuma County
(Diane Roberts)

Continued on page 17

OCTOBER 22
Boulder County

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Walt Combs, Courtney Rella,
Carly Crow, Michelle Trotter,
Laurie Tripp, Lorna Thomas, John Batt,
Linda Purcell, Mary Fran O'Connor,
Denise Reznicek, Anne Craig

**Boulder County field trippers Oct. 22
birding hard at Lagerman Reservoir**
(Michelle Trotter)



OCTOBER 24
Kiowa County mostly

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Gary Witt, Courtney Rella, Kent Bagley,
Judy McKeon, Ian de la Rosa, Debby
Miller, Oliver Urdiales, Diane Roberts,
Chad Livermore, Lorna Thomas

**Scoping a Kiowa County shoreline
on a 16-checklist trip Oct. 24**
(Diane Roberts)



OCTOBER 28
Lake Pueblo State Park

Leader
Kip Miller

Participants
Fran Rulon-Miller, David Suddjian,
Anne Craig, Kenneth Stuckey,
Linda Cunico, Michelle Trotter,
Laurie Tripp, Antoinette Burns

**Anne Craig photographing Curve-billed
Thrasher on Lake Pueblo SP trip Oct. 28**
(David Suddjian)



Continued on page 18

OCTOBER 31
Park County Reservoirs

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Diane Roberts, Luke Jaramillo, Melissa Wetzig,
Peggy Maslow, Debra and David Strike, Jennifer
Wilson Pines, Anne Craig, Julia Gwinn

**Trip leader David Suddjian and fellow grizzled
burro during Park County trip Oct. 31**
(Anne Craig)



Eurasian Collared Doves
Jim Esten

CONSERVATION

Nesting success: Tracing Swainson's Hawks' 2023 life cycle at Denver's Bluff Lake

Jason B. Bidgood

Swainson's Hawks are a common summer sight across Colorado and the Denver metro area — soaring, hunting and nesting amongst us. And now, from observations made throughout the 2023 season at Denver's [Bluff Lake Nature Center](#), we can piece together the entire life cycle of this annual mid-year resident. In fact, the well-documented presence of this year's nesting pair of Swainson's Hawks stretched from their spring courtship through the late-summer fledging of three apparently healthy juveniles.

Observations and data were plentiful this year. Sightings were reported during the nature center's First Saturday bird walks, on a number of Denver Field Ornithologists field trips, and in other individual encounters on eBird. And if we look back through observations recorded on eBird over the years, it's likely that there has been a Swainson's nesting pair at Bluff Lake in every breeding season since at least 2011. In the 12 seasons since, at least one person has reported seeing a juvenile Swainson's at the nature center during summer or noted the hawks' nesting activity on their eBird checklists.

Before then, Swainson's Hawk observations at Bluff Lake were very sparse. But many more reports and data have become available as the popularity of both eBird and the nature center have grown. (Bluff Lake sits on the east-central edge of the bustling Central Park neighborhood, former site of Denver's old Stapleton International Airport.)

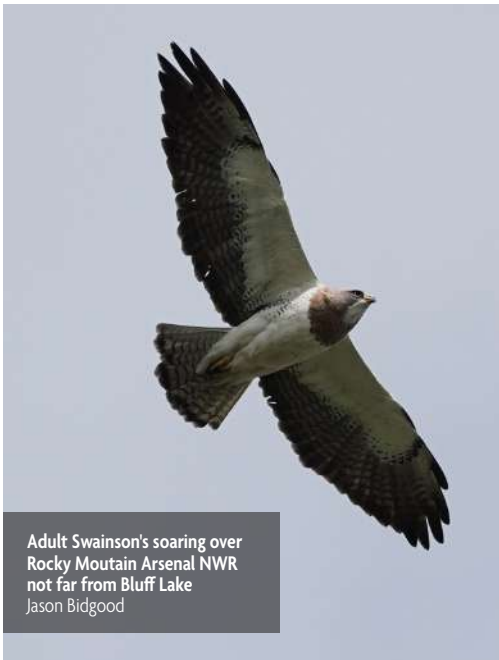
Flying north from wintering grounds in South America, Swainson's Hawks arrive at the nature center sometime in April. After a brief courtship, they start building their nest, usually in the same general area in the large cottonwoods that line the south side of the lake (nest location for at least 8 years now.). This year, a Swainson's pair was first seen on April 24. Within four days, nest building was confirmed (birds noted on April 28 carrying sticks to one of the trees).

On First Saturday bird walks over the next five weeks (May 6 and June 3), my birding group observed what was probably the female in her nest. Female Swainson's Hawks, which typically lay one to four eggs, do most of the incubating. Males cover the eggs only briefly while the female is away to

Continued on page 20



Adult Swainson's Hawk at Bluff Lake
Nature Center, April 28, 2023
Jason Bidgood



Adult Swainson's soaring over
Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR
not far from Bluff Lake
Jason Bidgood



Parent and one chick in
Bluff Lake nest on July 1
George Ho Jr.



Three Swainson's juveniles
around the nest on Aug. 5
George Ho Jr.



Recently fledged juveniles
perched at Bluff Lake on Aug. 27
Jason Bidgood

feed. Egg laying would have occurred about every other day, with the five-week incubation period starting immediately. So this year's hatchlings likely began to emerge by mid-June.

On July 1, during another First Saturday bird walk, we saw a fluffy white nestling poking its head up above the edge of the nest. On July 9, two nestlings were reported, and on July 30, three. By Aug. 5, on the next First Saturday bird walk, we observed the three young birds looking almost fully grown. One was still in the nest, but its two siblings were now branchlings, perched on tree limbs above the nest. We also spotted the parents on the north side of the lake, a few hundred yards from the nest.

During a visit three weeks later (Aug. 27), I saw all three juveniles out of the nest on nearby perches. This is the key milestone for young birds: Fledglings! The three were almost constantly calling for their parents, who at first were nowhere to be found. Later that morning, both adults returned to the area. The intensity of the fledglings' begging calls increased when their parents came into view.

Among Swainson's Hawks, juveniles continue to be fed by the adults for the first four to five weeks after fledging. After that, they leave the nesting territory and are on their own. But barely a week after my previous sighting, I was disappointed not to see any of the hawks during the nature center's Sept. 2 First Saturday bird walk. It appeared they had already moved on.

But three fledged young is above average for a successful Swainson's Hawk nest. Two fledglings are more typical. The number of fledged young is thought to correlate directly with the available food supply.

With nesting and fledging complete, Swainson's Hawks prepare for their very long-distance migration south to wintering grounds in the pampas region of Argentina. The journey begins in mid- to late September and runs to December. Like other raptors, these hawks migrate by day and avoid flying long distances over water. Their preferred route south runs through Mexico and Central America, then down through South America.

The pampas habitat is similar to their breeding habitat on the Great Plains. Swainson's Hawks prefer open grassland but have adapted to agricultural areas. Interestingly, their

preferred food in non-breeding season is almost exclusively grasshoppers, dragonflies, butterflies, moths, and other invertebrates.

By adding photographs, sound recordings, videos and notes about bird behavior to our eBird checklists, we can learn a lot about our local Swainson's Hawks and many other bird species. These may seem like only small, individual contributions to citizen science, but the cumulative effect is that we birders help tell a life history of birds that cannot be gleaned from mere reports of total species numbers seen on a bird walk.

A final caution: In some cases, providing details of nest locations might jeopardize nesting success. In such instances, it may be better to add observations once the young have fledged. But most of the time, additional documentation, though not required by eBird, makes our checklists more useful and interesting. It helps our understanding of the birds we see.

References

Bechard, M. J., C. S. Houston, J. H. Sarasola, and A. S. England (2020). Swainson's Hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*), version 1.0. In *Birds of the World* (A. F. Poole, Editor). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA. <https://doi.org/10.2173/bow.swahaw.01>

eBird checklists:

- [Jacques, Benjamin, April 24, 2023 \(S134915387\)](#)
- [Bidgood, Jason, April 28 \(S135584820\)](#)
- [Bidgood, Jason, May 6 \(S136376911\)](#)
- [Bidgood, Jason, June 3 \(S140335075\)](#)
- [Bidgood, Jason, July 1 \(S143239898\)](#)
- [Woon, Jonathan, July 9 \(S144039316\)](#)
- [Pera, Lisa, July 30 \(S146020747\)](#)
- [Auckland, Julie, August 1 \(S146198511\)](#)
- [Bidgood, Jason, August 5 \(S146504685\)](#)
- [Bidgood, Jason, August 27 \(S148233970\)](#)
- [Bidgood, Jason, September 5 \(S148784217\)](#)

Jason B. Bidgood, who joined DFO in 2016, is a DFO field trip leader and one of several volunteer leaders for the popular First Saturday Bluff Lake bird walks. His other favorite birding spots near his Central Park home include Sand and Westerly creeks and Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR.

CONSERVATION

December 16: Join in Denver Christmas Bird Count!

Joey Kellner

If it's November, that means only about a month until the annual Denver Christmas Bird Count (CBC), sponsored by National Audubon. This year's count, the 69th in Denver, is scheduled for **Saturday, Dec. 16.**

Count leader/compiler **Joey Kellner**, a longtime DFO member and field trip leader, encourages everyone to participate, from beginning birders to experts, and everyone in between. As he notes every year, "Fees: None! So, no excuses! Come have a great time and help count birds!"

The Denver CBC, which is conducted inside a 15-mile diameter circle over most of southwest metro Denver, is one of several along the greater Denver stretch of the Front Range. It is centered roughly between Ken Caryl and Columbine and bounded by Green Mountain on the north, Littleton east, Douglas County above Louviers on the south and Jefferson County foothills communities west. It also includes Chatfield SP and several major reservoirs. For the CBC, it is divided into 23 count zones where assigned teams canvass their areas for species and numbers.

Another count bearing the Denver name — *Urban Denver*, centered east of downtown and containing a bit of Aurora — takes place on New Year's Day. That count is near the end of the roughly three-week window in which thousands of Audubon CBCs take place across the continent.

Depending on area, the suburban Denver count may run just half a day or until day's end. But participants are free to come for an hour, a morning or all day. And after the day in the field, all participants are invited to attend the annual compilation meeting to warm up, chat with other birders, and find out how the count went.

This year's post-count meetup is set for 5 p.m. MST in the Chatfield SP headquarters, which is on the south-central side of Chatfield Reservoir near the park's Heronry Overlook. Access is via the park entrance off South Wadsworth Boulevard. State parks vehicle entry pass is required, and carpooling is encouraged.

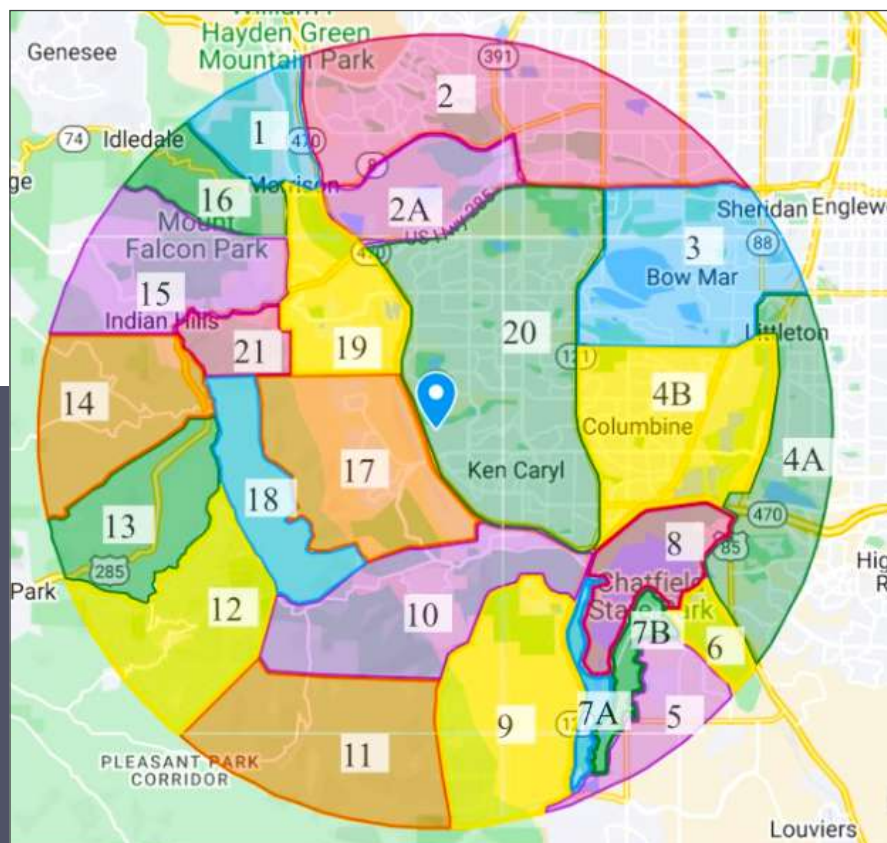
To sign up for a count that interests you, see the map of numbered count areas that accompanies this story. Then go to the list of count leaders and area names, find the ones that correspond to the numbered area you want to join, and phone or email the leader. If you want Kellner to assign you to a less-in-demand area that may need additional observers, contact him at swdenverbirding@gmail.com or 303-978-1748. Any other questions? Contact Kellner for answers, too.

The count also includes stationary participants who compile species and numbers that visit their bird feeders at home within the count circle on count day. You can join in this feeder count by contacting Kellner as well.



Continued on page 23

Area	Location name	Area leader	Contact info
1	Red Rocks Park	Gregg Goodrich	303-655-9135
2	Lower Bear Creek	Scott Somershoe	615-829-3573
2A	Bear Creek Lake Park	Cyndy Johnson	303-378-1335
3	Bow Mar/Marston	Art Hudak	720-671-3331
4A	Lower South Platte/East	Ed Holub	303-979-2194
4B	Lower South Platte/West	Glenn Walbek	720-560-3671
5	Highline Ditch	Nancy Crews	303-842-2833
6	Plum Creek	Norm Erthal	303-917-2596
7A	Middle South Platte/West	Sue Summers	253-678-3721
7B	Middle South Platte/East	(Leader confirmation pending)	---
8	Chatfield Reservoir	Joey Kellner	303-978-1748
9	Upper South Platte**	Jill Holden	720-288-4018
10	Lower Deer Creek (Chatfield Farms)	Barbra Sobhani	303-905-4718
11	Upper Deer Creek	Paul Slingsby	720-347-5169
12	Yegge Peak	Cynthia Madsen	303-770-6534
13	Doublehead Mountain	Amy Davis	303-549-7759
14	North Turkey Creek	Ed Furlong	303-956-8321
15	Indian Hills	Dick Prickett	303-674-0217
16	Upper Bear Creek	Laura Steadman	lauramsteadman@gmail.com
17	Ken Caryl Ranch	David Suddjian	dsuddjian@gmail.com
18	Garrison Gate	(Leader needed, contact Kellner)	303-978-1748
19	Morrison/Willowbrook	Chris Gilbert	804-214-1508
20	Willow Creek	Dale Pate	575-706-4584
21	Mt.Lindo/Willow Springs	Chris Sherry	303-807-3645



**** To participate in this area, contact leader no later than Monday, Nov. 22**

Area numbers on CBC map correspond to list of leaders and contact info

Joey Kellner, a four-decade member of DFO, is a field trip leader, compiler of the Denver Christmas Bird Count, club past president (1994-96), and the 2012 recipient of the Ptarmigan Award, DFO's highest honor.

CONSERVATION

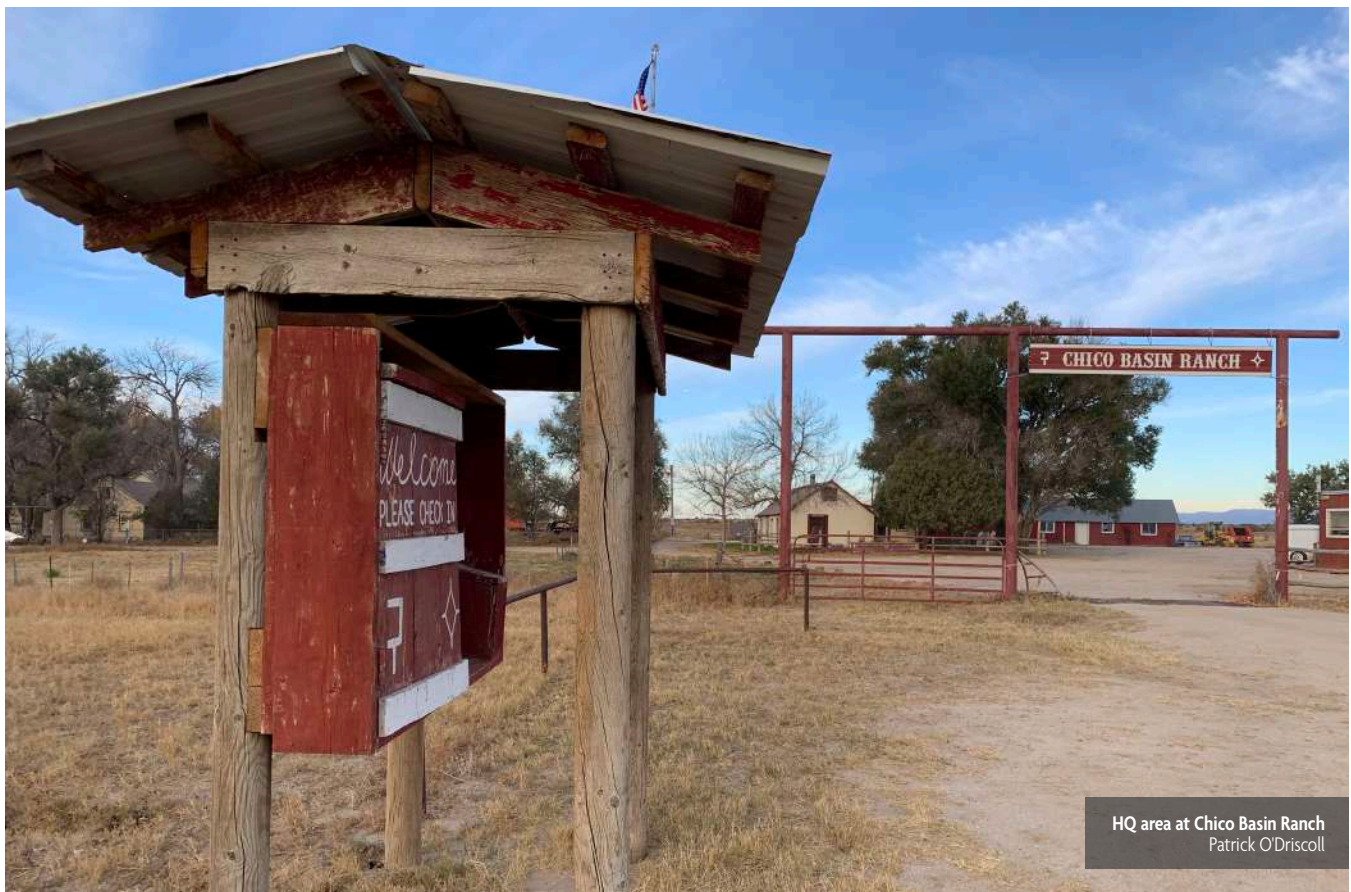
State rejects longtime, bird-friendly Chico Basin Ranch operator for new livestock tenant

Patrick O'Driscoll and Roger Koester

The Colorado State Land Board has approved a new lease at Chico Basin Ranch that will end 25 years of a family-owned, bird-friendly cattle company's stewardship over one of the state's richest birdlife locales.

After 5 hours of testimony and board discussion before an overflow crowd at its monthly meeting Nov. 8, the commissioners voted 4-1 to award the 10-year lease to a different ranching family, the Johnsons of Kit Carson, CO. [Flying Diamond](#), their five-generation livestock outfit with more than century-old roots in Cheyenne County, takes over the 87,000-acre ranch in El Paso and Pueblo counties about 13 months from now, on Jan. 1, 2025.

The decision will uproot the three-generation Duke Phillips family from the state-owned expanse of Great Plains shortgrass prairie. Since 1999, Chico Basin has been home and headquarters for [Ranchlands](#), the Phillipses' five-ranch, four state cattle and bison operation. Ranchlands is regarded in the cattle industry as perhaps the most exemplary steward and ranch manager in the state. Birding and conservation groups have applauded the company's balanced focus on improving the ranch and its resources for all users — birds and other wildlife, cattle, and people.



HQ area at Chico Basin Ranch
Patrick O'Driscoll

Continued on page 25

After spirited discussion and debate pitting Flying Diamond's higher money bid against Ranchlands' deep investment in holistic stewardship, ranching education and community well-being, the board majority was unwilling to second-guess its bidding procedures and staff recommendation. The land board staff had ranked Flying Diamond first and Ranchlands second among 11 bids that made the qualifying cut from more than 30 bids originally submitted.

After board staff reviewed the bid particulars, both families gave presentations. The Phillipses stressed stewardship, education, community and other intangibles, and they criticized the land board's refusal to agree to renegotiate a new lease directly with them, even when "the staff said we had exceeded all expectations," said **Duke Phillips IV**.

The Johnsons focused on winning elements of their No. 1 ranking in the bidding, but they also touted their own holistic ranch practices: "We work with nature, not against it," **Charlie Johnson** told the board. "We listen to what the soil, grass and cattle tell us."

A parade of supporters, many of them ranching folk, stood up in person and via Zoom to praise one family or the other. Uncounted others filed statements of support online to the land board before the meeting. The board had intended to award the lease at its October meeting, but it postponed the decision after the Phillipses filed a formal appeal when the board staff's recommendation became public.

"This is not apples and oranges," remarked one Flying Diamond supporter, a knowledgeable cattle rancher who noted the strengths of both bidders. "It's more like Honey Crisp apples and Gala apples. Both are good."

But **Dallas May**, a southeast Colorado rancher recognized for the same holistic ranch practices as the Phillipses', told the land board: "I think you have a flawed system" for awarding lease contracts. "Anytime you talk about maximum financial gain, it raises red flags for me."

Financial gain is the land board's purpose, however. It holds Chico Basin and other state properties as investments whose lease income goes to K-12 schooling. And the dollar difference in the two bids was considerable: Flying Diamond's \$7.5 million guarantee over the 10-year lease was 38 percent higher than Ranchlands' \$5.4 million.

The Phillipses and their supporters argued that their many diverse improvements and advancements over a quarter-century of stewardship outweighed the monetary difference. They noted that the land board previously ranked protection of ranch "natural values" and competent, capable management as higher priorities than financial return.

Conservation groups also praised Ranchlands' work to improve ranch habitat, protect natural features and wildlife, promote nature education, and keep its gate open to birders, scientists and the public — all while still operating a successful cattle business.

"What the Phillips family has nurtured on the Chico is truly unique," said **Linda Hodges**, conservation chair of Aiken Audubon, the Colorado Springs chapter of National Audubon. She said Ranchlands "is uniquely suited to manage Chico's landscape at the highest level . . . I want to ensure that the land continues to support birds and wildlife."



Burrowing Owl on cholla
cactus at Chico Basin
Bill Maynard

Continued on page 26



and capable management.” The ranch’s continued and future health “is more important than the highest financial gain,” Tinianow added. “Who wouldn’t want to extend Ranchlands’ superior performance in protecting the ranch and its natural attributes while giving the state a fair and reasonable return?”

After public comment closed, the matter returned to the board for a motion and vote. The four commissioners who would vote for the Flying Diamond bid rambled about both sides of the issue, declaring stewardship and financial return both important. Two or three even appeared to echo Ranchlands’ talking points. But ultimately, they all fell back to “respecting the process” — even if it might have flaws — and to heeding the staff recommendation.

Commissioner **Josie Heath** of Boulder, who cast the only dissenting vote, was also the only one to offer a strong opinion. More important, she said, were Ranchlands’ community-building intangibles, and the continuity of having such a highly successful lessee continue to operate the ranch.

After the vote, commissioners appeared to acknowledge the risk in switching to new management on such a large and important property. Board president **Christine Scanlon** asked the staff to monitor and report any changes once Flying Diamond takes over.

Earlier in the proceedings, Heath had asked staff to explain the extensive changes it will implement next year for birding, regardless of who manages the ranch. Under Ranchlands’ management, birders have had open-gate, self-guided access to Chico Basin Ranch year-round for decades. But beginning March 1, 2024, the land board will bar birding access except for 10 weeks a year — five each during spring and fall migration, when the banding station will also operate. But further limits will restrict birder movement to only three locations, cap daily visits at just 20 birders total, and slash birding hours to mornings only, 7 a.m. to 1 p.m. ([Aiken Audubon](#) will manage birding beginning March 1 under a no-fee lease with the land board.)

Replying to Heath, assistant director **Greg Ochis** said: “Our preference was to narrow the use to these time periods to minimize conflicts” between birding and ranching activities and “to better manage occupancy at the ranch.” The Phillips family previously has contradicted that claim, saying no such conflicts have ever occurred with birders.

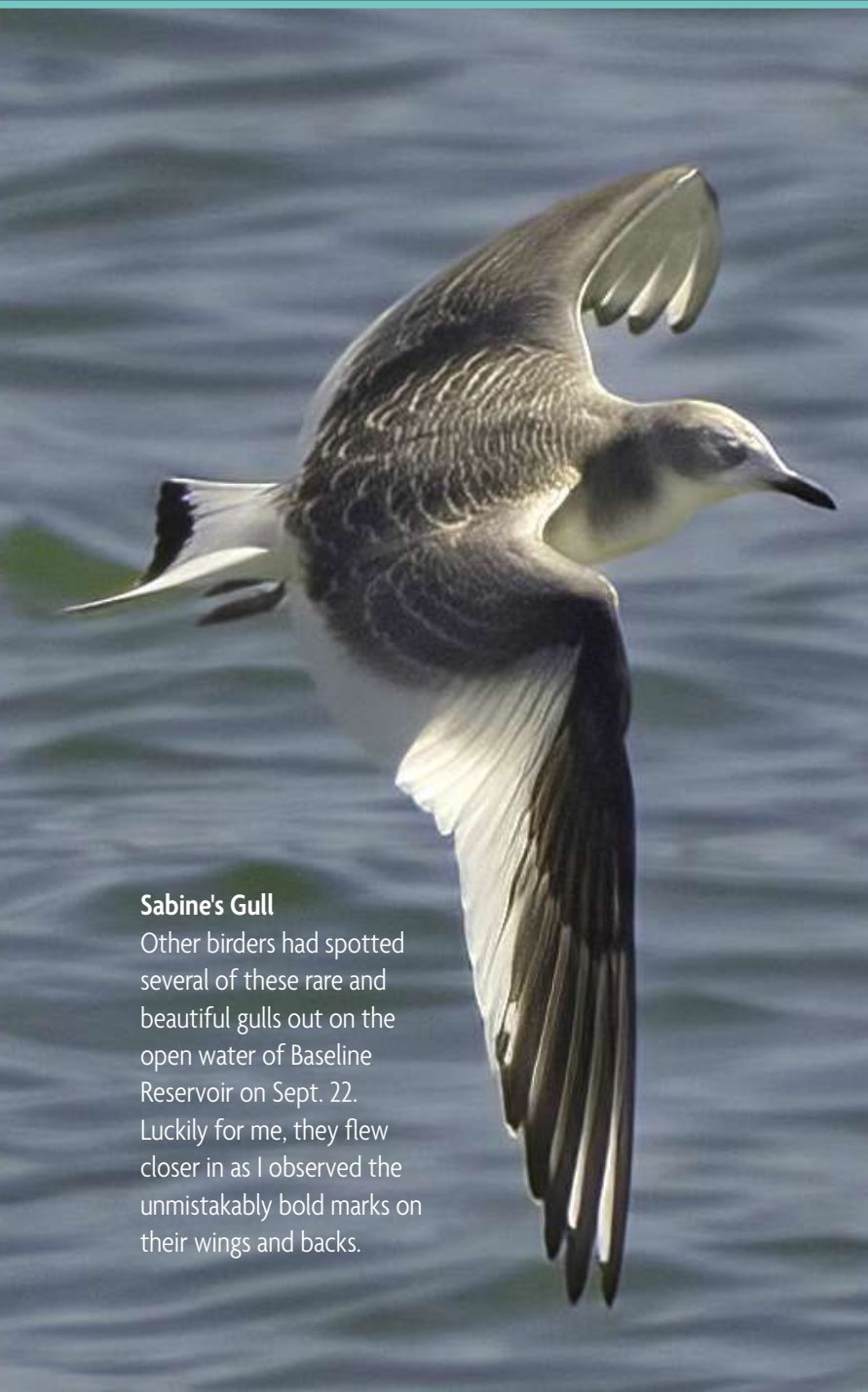
Colin Woolley of Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, which has banded more than 30,000 birds at the ranch, said: “The connections that are nurtured between people, land and wildlife . . . are crucial for preserving the natural resources of the Chico . . . I oversee a number of bird banding stations throughout the state, and every year Chico is first.”

Linda Lee of Colorado Field Ornithologists urged against interrupting the Phillipses’ good work upon the land. “Continuity we feel is crucial . . . (for this) critical migratory and breeding hotspot for birds. It is imperative the we maintain the health of grassland fragments” that Chico’s unbroken expanse of prairie habitat represents. “Their practices in restorative vegetation . . . (have improved) habitat for hundreds of bird species that come to Chico Basin Ranch each year . . . Ranchlands are the proven steward that this ranch needs for now and for the future.”

In a statement of support, Denver Field Ornithologists President **Sharon Tinianow** noted the ranch’s perennial appeal as a field trip destination, with DFO outings filling up “so quickly, there’s a waiting list the same day” they’re announced. The reason is how “bird-friendly” the landscape is, she said, thanks to Ranchlands’ “careful

LAST WORD, LAST LOOK

Close to home, close up: How one birder filled his lens this summer



Sabine's Gull

Other birders had spotted several of these rare and beautiful gulls out on the open water of Baseline Reservoir on Sept. 22. Luckily for me, they flew closer in as I observed the unmistakably bold marks on their wings and backs.

In 2023, great birds seemed to be everywhere in Colorado for the seeing — and for birders with cameras, for the keepsaking. The only limit was how often and how far we were willing to pursue them.

But in a year of the chase, the life list and the perfect shot, Broomfield birder and DFO member **John Salisbury** took a different approach. He puts it simply: “I decided to limit my birding to Boulder County this year.”

Salisbury couldn't have known that circumstance would bring perhaps the unlikeliest new Colorado species of 2023 to Boulder County — one everyone else but him had chased weeks earlier well south of metro Denver — when a Limpkin showed up July 19 in a farmland birding hotspot east of Boulder.

“A total surprise this year,” he says, especially after Colorado's first sighting of the tropical wetlands bird at Ramah State Wildlife Area, a two-hour drive south and east. “I was fortunate enough to be one of the first to see this bird as it sat in a tree” near Teller Lake No. 5.

We, too, are fortunate to reprint some of Salisbury's images of birds in Boulder County this summer. As we prepare to turn the page to 2024, enjoy this summer lookback gallery, with caption commentary from Salisbury on “the beautiful and unique birds that visited this year.”

Photos by John Salisbury

Continued on page 27

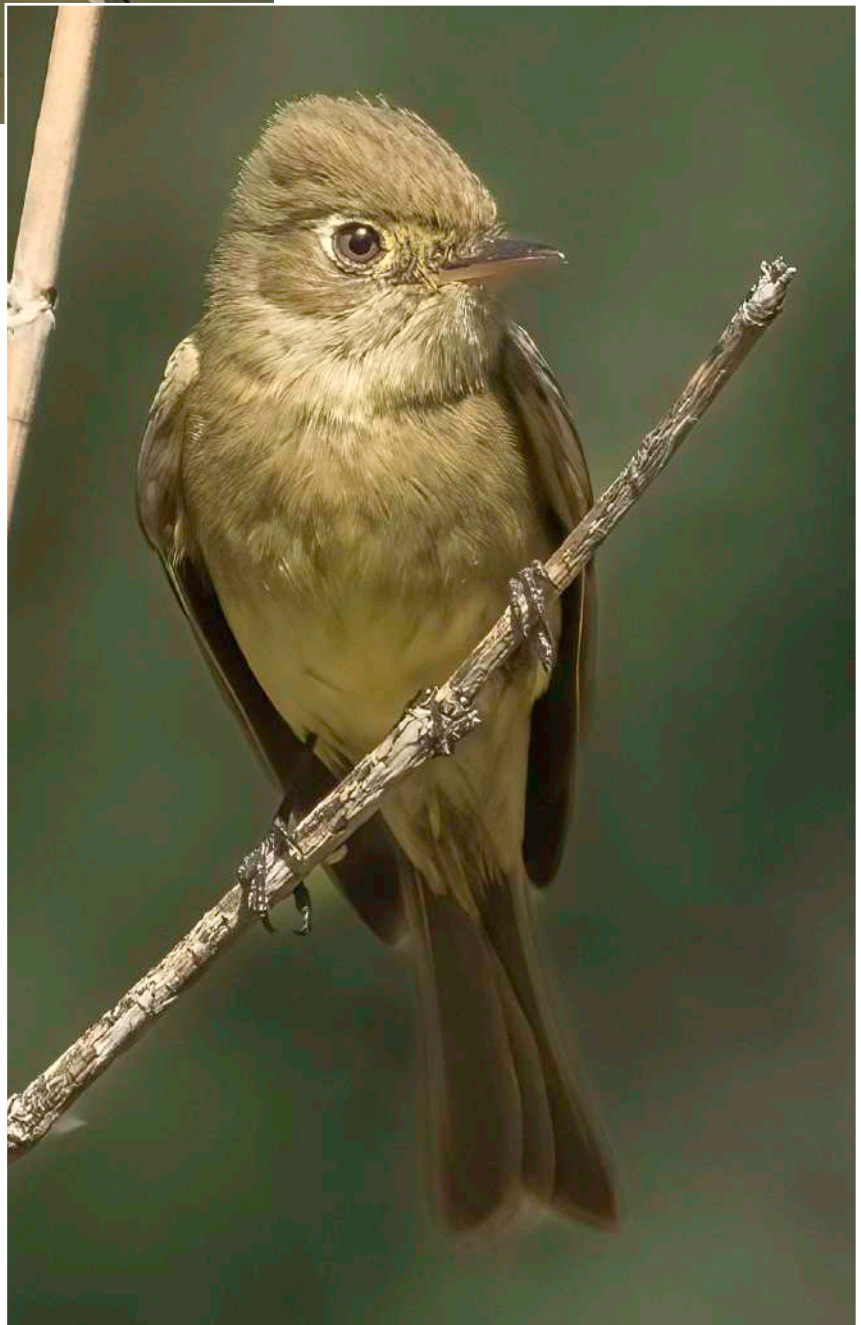


◀ Loggerhead Shrike

I was birding out on Gunbarrel Hill on June 2 when I crested a ridge and came upon this bird resting on a low bush. It was totally unexpected, and awash with warm early morning light.

Cordilleran Flycatcher ▶

At Goshawk Ridge in South Boulder on June 9, a small bird flying between trees above a canal caught my eye. As I approached, it sat down in the tree right in front of me — a Cordilleran Flycatcher. Less than a month later, the American Ornithological Society lumped Cordie and its virtually identical relative, the Pacific-slope Flycatcher, into a single species, the Western Flycatcher.





◀ Red Crossbill

I had wanted to see this species up close for several years before finally catch a few frames of this one on June 10 at a private-residence bird feeder in Allenspark, just off the Peak to Peak Scenic Highway. That namesake bill is a real treat to see.

▼ Fox Sparrow

This uncommon bird was quite active when I spotted it on July 1 in a high meadow near the old Caribou town site. As I walked down between the willows into the open meadow, it greeted me from atop a bush.





▲ **Wilson's Warbler**

Another distinctive songbird in that high Caribou meadow on July 1 was this Wilson's Warbler. His bright coloring and prominent black cap stood out against the surrounding vegetation.

◀ **Broad-tailed Hummingbird**

Birding at hummingbird feeders in the mountains and places like Greenlee Preserve in Lafayette is one of my favorite things to do in summer. Getting a shot like this one, taken at a private residence on July 26, is a challenge with lots of trial and error. But their rapid and repeated flights to and from feeders offer many opportunities.

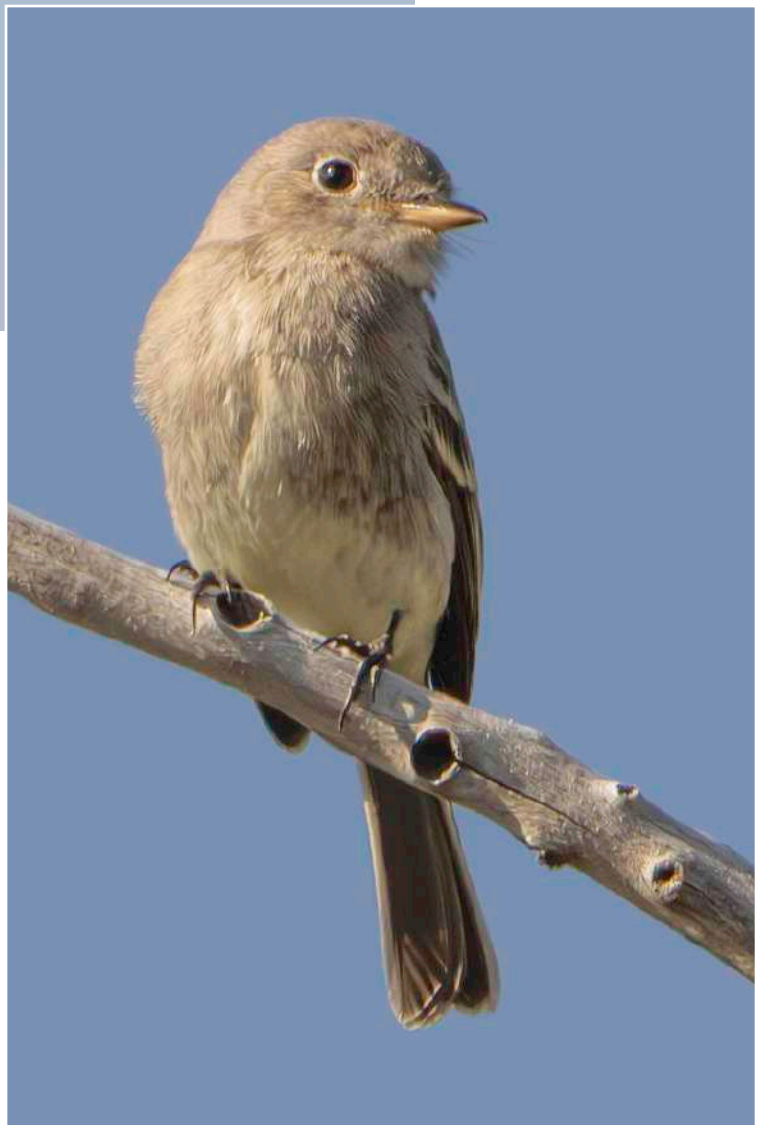


◀ Peregrine Falcon

Catching this handsome bird overhead as I walked the White Rock Trail on Aug. 11 was one of the highlights of my year. It gave us really good looks at its dark “sideburns.”

Gray Flycatcher ▶

A late-season sighting at Mesa Reservoir on Sept. 12 revealed this Gray Flycatcher, a tiny bird whose lower yellow mandible is an unmistakable field mark for an otherwise rather colorless species.





Until the next Lark Bunting . . .
GOOD EARLY WINTER BIRDING!

Limpkin, Teller Lake No. 5, Boulder County